



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—Neamhcheartaithe
(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 25 Márta 2026

Wednesday, 25 March 2026

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan) i gceannas ar 9 a.m.

Paidir agus Machnamh.

Prayer and Reflection.

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 39 and the name of the Member in each case:

Deputy John Paul O'Shea - To discuss the provision of bus connections to and from Charleville train station.

Deputy Joe Cooney - To discuss the regular reporting of the defective concrete block appeals board.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan - To discuss wandering and malnourished horses in urban areas of Limerick.

Deputy Sorca Clarke - To discuss Cloontagh national school.

Deputy Alan Kelly - To discuss the need for greater capital investment in north Tipperary schools.

Deputy David Cullinane - To discuss defects at an apartment complex in Waterford city.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman - To discuss the evaluation of the community safety wardens pilot under the north inner city community safety partnership.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne - To discuss the need for a new building for a school in Gorey, County Wexford.

Deputy Albert Dolan - To discuss battery energy storage systems and solar planning guidelines in rural Ireland.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke - To discuss delivery of a new school building at Dunboyne junior and senior national schools.

Deputy Colm Burke - To discuss making Ryeqo - relogulix, oestradiol and norethisterone - available under the GMS scheme.

Deputy Jen Cummins - To discuss public health nursing in Dublin 8 and Dublin 12.

Deputy Louis O'Hara - To discuss the new school campus for Gaelscoil Riada and Coláiste an Eachréidh in Athenry, County Galway.

Deputy Conor Sheehan - To discuss the progress of a new Garda station in Castletroy.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú - To discuss mileage and travel allowances for community healthcare staff.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire - To discuss delivery of a permanent school building for Owenabue ETNS, Carrigaline, Cork.

Deputy Thomas Gould - To discuss the voids return programme and the need to return vacant boarded-up homes to use.

Deputy Pa Daly - To discuss the upcoming carbon tax increase in home heating oil.

Deputies Catherine Ardagh, Aengus Ó Snodaigh - To discuss progress on school buildings for St. Seton's, Ballyfermot, Dublin 10.

The matters raised by Deputies Maurice Quinlivan, Colm Burke, Joe Cooney, Catherine Ardagh, Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Alan Kelly have been selected for discussion

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Animal Welfare

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Here we go again. I have raised the issue of wandering ill-treated horses many times over the years. It remains an ongoing and worsening concern in Limerick and other areas. Recently a horse was euthanised in a green area on a local estate in Limerick city. The very ill horse was abandoned on Friday, 13 March, unable to rise from the ground. A vet finally arrived on the Sunday and euthanised the horse, and the carcass of the horse was removed on the following day, Monday, 16 March, four days after the horse was abandoned. This incident started on Friday with a horse clearly dying, abandoned on a green area in the middle of a housing estate full of families. It was an ugly sight, particularly for children, to witness. While I appreciate the animal was finally removed, the incident highlights the plight of these animals, their mistreatment and the lack of enforcement of chip and pin and other urban horse legislation.

There are no consequences for those who mistreat their animals. Legislation that is not enforced is not worth having. The Control of Horses Act is under review and has been for some time. I have submitted parliamentary questions on this, including one four years ago and one in October 2022. One response stated the Control of Horses Act is under review with a view to simplifying and further improving the legislation and that plans are advanced. Another response thanked me for raising the important topic and stated it is one the Minister takes very seriously but here we are, four years later, with no progress. I urge the Minister that when the

legislation is amended that an enforcement mechanism is included. Allowing those who abuse, misuse and assault their animals to simply replace a dead horse with new foal must not be allowed to continue. Allowing people, often young children, to ride these horses on our national road network, delaying traffic and causing distress to the animals, must end. Allowing people to purchase horses and ponies without adhering to chip-and-pin legislation must end.

Equine legislation requires that all horses are micro-chipped, have adequate land to graze on and are kept in a safe environment. This simply is not the case in many urban areas and has been ignored. The issue was raised in the Dáil almost 50 years ago by the late Limerick TD Mick Lipper, and it is this extremely disheartening and depressing that I have had to raise this issue myself on many occasions since I was first elected more than a decade ago. We have not got to grips with this challenge. The mistreatment of these poor animals has been tolerated for far too long.

Some months ago I drove through three of Limerick's urban estates and during a 45-minute drive I encountered 50 horses. Many times since, I have noticed that the number of horses on the public green spaces has not changed whatsoever. The placement of horses in public spaces in more affluent areas would simply not be tolerated. Can we imagine a dead horse remaining *in situ* in a more affluent area? It would not have happened and it would not have been tolerated. It would not have been there for four or five days. Why are we expected to tolerate this in working class areas? Why is this acceptable? Green spaces should be available for all. They should be spaces where children can kick a ball and play. We need to reclaim our public spaces for everybody in the community. What we have in many urban estates are limited green spaces being claimed by a small few, who allow horses to graze on these public spaces. They often destroy them and prevent other children and other people from using them. These are community spaces and communities must be allowed to reclaim them.

There is an important role for the local council and the Garda to play in addressing the issue of wandering urban horses but overall responsibility for the issue ultimately lies with the Minister and the Department. It is time to get heads together so a permanent solution can be found, and the people in these estates can reclaim their public spaces and we finally deal with the issue of urban horses being mistreated, wandering and causing stress and chaos in many parts of our cities.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Martin Heydon): I thank Deputy Quinlivan for raising this important matter. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is responsible for all policy and legislation in relation to the Control of Horses Act 1996. Operation of the Act comes under the remit of local authorities. Any report of welfare issues received by my Department, including breaches of the animal welfare legislation, is acted upon and investigated. Appropriate enforcement action where breaches or shortcomings are identified is undertaken by my Department and authorised officers are appointed under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, including but not limited to An Garda Síochána, customs agents, local authorities and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, NSPCA.

Primary responsibility for protecting the welfare of equines rests with the owner or keeper. Under the Control of Horses Act 1996, local authorities may take a range of actions in relation to equines, including prohibiting horses in certain areas, issuing licences and seizing horses in

contravention of the Act. These powers can be used in respect of straying horses, which includes horses put on land without the owner's permission, including public land as Deputy Quinlivan has described. Local authorities may also prosecute offenders. While my Department provides financial support to help local authorities with the costs of these seizures, local authorities are responsible for the operation of the Control of Horses Act. My Department collects information from local authorities on a quarterly basis in respect of the overall number of equines seized by them. The number of horses seized in Limerick in 2025 was 70. This number is down from 2024, when the number of horses seized was 87.

The Government is fully committed to supporting sustainable initiatives in line with the programme for Government and Working Together for Animal Welfare, which is Ireland's animal welfare strategy for 2021 to 2025, with work progressing on the replacement strategy. As part of this commitment, my Department has continued to support urban horse projects nationwide, working with local authorities, charities and community stakeholders. These projects have proven very successful and are aimed specifically at equine welfare and marginalised communities. The projects can foster community leadership and education in responsible horse ownership for young people. An exemplar project of note is one which Deputy Quinlivan is familiar with. This is the Moyross project, which has been in operation since 2016 and has helped so many young people from disadvantaged communities.

From 2015 to date, over €2.1 million has been spent on urban horse projects by my Department, with €170,000 allocated for these projects in 2026. The urban horse projects greatly benefit the welfare of equines and of young people from disadvantaged communities or backgrounds. There are seven live projects and my Department would welcome new submissions from local authorities to develop urban horse projects in their respective areas. In December 2025, my Department awarded funding of almost €6.5 million to 94 animal welfare charities throughout the country, under the animal welfare grants programme. Of that figure, just over €4 million was awarded to charities involved in the care and welfare of horses. More generally, in 2025 my Department published a report by Professor Paddy Wall on equine traceability and welfare, and has also prepared an action plan to implement its recommendations.

The report by Professor Wall, which has 22 actions, is greatly advanced.

I am working closely to ensure its implementation across a whole range of measures relating to urban horses and equines, and otherwise. What happens in this area is important.

We completed a public consultation on the Department's animal welfare strategy in January. I am collating the many submissions we got on that. Equine welfare has featured in some of those points. That will feed into our new animal welfare strategy for 2026 to 2030.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I thank the Minister for his response. I will seek clarification on the number of horses collected, year on year. The reason they are not being collected is that the local authorities have, in many cases, simply stopped collecting them. They will say that themselves. When we collect horses in Limerick, for example, we need to ensure we have gardaí available and that the pound is available. The pound is only able to collect four horses. Gardaí tell us it is not worth their while coming out to collect four horses so the collection of horses has simply collapsed. It is not that there are fewer horses there. Unfortunately, there

are far more horses there. The Minister will have to come to see it for himself to believe what is going on.

I have tried to bring people together on this issue. I recently attended a meeting with the directly elected mayor and the director general and their staff to discuss this issue. I provided them with the detail of the numerous parliamentary questions I have asked over the years on this ongoing issue. I am sure the mayor, like the rest of the council, wants to see this matter addressed, but the direction and leadership must come from the Department. It comes back to providing resources to ensure the enforcement of the legislation. The level of impunity can be frustrating for so many people.

I know that many urban horse owners do not mistreat their animals and care for them. There are some fantastic urban horse projects, as the Minister mentioned, across the State where those with an affinity for animals can learn how to care for them and do so with pride. I have no issue with those good horse owners whatsoever. However, I take massive issue with those who abuse their animals, leave them shackled day and night and unable to roam, often with no water or food, regardless of the weather. I take issue with the legislation that is there to protect these animals not being enforced. Some will argue that the keeping of ponies and horses is a tradition but, to be clear, riding horses through our public spaces and wrecking them is not a tradition or culture. It is a display of lawlessness and an affront to those who abide by the rules. We need a solution. We need to bring together all the stakeholders, such as horse owners, An Garda Síochána, Limerick council, animal welfare organisations, projects such as My Lovely Horse and the Department of agriculture, to work to set a timeframe - I would suggest six months - after which horses will not roam in public areas in Limerick. We need a change of direction here. The hands-off approach has not worked. We must take the reins and ensure we finally address this issue.

Deputy Martin Heydon: I thank the Deputy for his dedication to this topic. He has raised it on more than one occasion. I absolutely agree that this issue merits attention. From my perspective, there is no shortage of resources being put in from my side. I take on board the Deputy's points about co-ordination. I am happy to work with other stakeholders - the Deputy mentioned An Garda Síochána, the county council and the different entities - to ensure we have a targeted response in key areas.

I agree that there are as many people who are passionate about their horses in urban areas as there are in rural areas and they care for them greatly. However, in normal, everyday society, we need to have a clear understanding of what is acceptable activity and what is unacceptable activity in our urban areas, where many people live and share common spaces, and beyond. More important than that, and the legislation is clearly set down and comes under my Department, is the welfare of animals. We have lead responsibility for that issue. I take animal welfare seriously and committed to the policy that animal welfare standards are rigorously applied in a fair and even-handed manner. It can sometimes be about the need for additional measures to be legislated for in this House. It is sometimes about the implementation of legislation that exists. With the local authorities, the other relevant authorities and the Garda, there is a key role to play.

My Department keeps animal welfare legislation under review with respect to the developments in the area of animal welfare and the practical lessons learned from operating

the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. As the Deputy will be aware, my Department also operates a confidential animal welfare helpline, through which members of the public can report incidents of animal cruelty or neglect for investigation. We work with all the relevant stakeholders in that regard. I thank the Deputy for raising these points.

Medicinal Products

Deputy Colm Burke: I thank the Minister of State for making himself available to deal with this matter. March, this month, is endometriosis awareness month. I am raising this issue to highlight a drug to which I will refer in this matter, namely, Ryeqo. It is available in over 27 countries across Europe. While it is available to purchase in Ireland, it is not available under the general medical services, GMS, scheme.

In October 2025, the Minister for Health launched a national framework for the management of endometriosis in Ireland. The HSE, together with the Department of Health, has established a number of centres around the country, including in Tallaght University Hospital, Cork University Hospital, the Rotunda Hospital, the Coombe hospital, University Hospital Limerick, Galway University Hospital and the National Maternity Hospital. We have developed all of these centres to provide care for women. It is estimated that one in ten women will be affected by endometriosis.

I know of the case of a 20-year-old girl who has undergone surgery. Two different consultants have recommended that she use the drug Ryeqo but she cannot afford it because it is not available to her under the GMS scheme. She is 20 years of age. She has gone through the surgery and the drug is not available.

In 2022, the drug was submitted for approval under the drugs payment scheme, but it was turned down on the basis that it would not be economical to have it in the GMS scheme. I would argue with that. A huge number of women require care. It is not just surgical care. They also require the use of medication. This particular medication is not available but is being recommended by consultants. If you are lucky enough to have the income, you can purchase it, but if you do not, you are in difficulty, and in many cases there is no alternative. I ask for this matter to be reconsidered and given the priority it deserves.

I fully understand that each year, there is a budget for the purchase of pharmaceuticals and drugs. However, 27 countries across Europe have this drug available under their health schemes but it is not available here in Ireland. In October 2025, the Minister set out a clear timeline to try to make all care available to women who had this medical condition. We have developed the surgical approach. For instance, we now have specialist units in Cork and Tallaght to deal with the condition, and other units are providing care across the country. It is wrong that we are able to provide surgical care now but are not prepared to provide the medication that is required either before the person is identified as requiring surgery or after surgery is completed. I ask that the matter be reviewed. We should go back into the negotiating process so that an agreement can be reached to have this drug made available. I ask for that to be done at the earliest possible date.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan): I thank the Deputy for raising the important issue of

endometriosis. It is something that for too long we have not spoken about. There still is not enough awareness of what it is and the challenges and difficulties that women across Ireland face when they have this condition. There are women across Ireland living in severe pain because of endometriosis. There are woman across Ireland who experience heavy bleeding. There are women who have to undertake serious surgery to treat endometriosis, which is very painful and has a long recovery time.

There are couples right across Ireland who, because of endometriosis, are facing incredible challenges with reproduction. These are all things that for far too long we have not spoken enough about publicly. We have not raised enough awareness about it. I am really heartened that Deputy Burke has raised the issue here today and that women right across Ireland are speaking out about it and about the necessity to treat it and, more important, to get access for women to treat this condition. That is the most important point. I commend the Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, on tackling this issue head-on and putting it front and centre as something she wants to address. I just wanted to say that at the outset.

In 2025 and earlier this year, the Minister engaged directly with women on a one-to-one basis through the patient voice forum and listened to their personal experiences of endometriosis. The national framework for the management of endometriosis in Ireland was published in October 2025. This marks a milestone in the evolution of women's healthcare in Ireland. The framework establishes, for the first time, a defined clinical care pathway for women and girls living with endometriosis. In conjunction with this framework, the Minister has written to all GPs, consultants and other clinicians to raise awareness of endometriosis in their clinical assessments. Moreover, the expansion of endometriosis services provided in Ireland is supported through the HSE's national service plan.

Regarding Ryeqo, I will provide some background for our colleagues and then address Deputy Burke's question. Relugolix, estradiol and norethisterone acetate, marketed under the trade name Ryeqo, is a medicine used for the symptomatic treatment of endometriosis in women of reproductive age with a history of medical or surgical treatment for their endometriosis.

The European Medicines Agency, EMA, granted marketing authorisation for this product in July 2021. The company marketing this medicine made an application for addition to the HSE's reimbursement list in May 2024. The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions. HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics, NCPE. Formal processes govern applications for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines, and new uses of existing medicines, to be funded or reimbursed. The HSE commissioned a health technology assessment, HTA, in July 2024. Just under a year later, in July 2025, the applicant submitted a full HTA dossier to the NCPE. Further engagement between the NCPE and the applicant has taken place in the interim, and the application remains under consideration. The HSE cannot make any comment on possible outcomes from the ongoing process.

The Deputy can see from those milestones that it took considerable time for the State to receive the necessary dossier. We cannot progress reimbursement applications without timely engagement. We strongly encourage all pharmaceutical companies to apply for reimbursement here in Ireland and to submit fully prepared HTA dossiers in a timely fashion.

Deputy Colm Burke: I thank the Minister of State. My information is that it was in February 2022 that the NCPE concluded that there was insufficient evidence of cost-effectiveness for the drug to be approved for reimbursement by the Health Service Executive. Obviously, there is a new application in. The Department of Health has taken decisions previously where the NCPE turned down a particular drug because of its cost-effectiveness, but it is about far more than just cost-effectiveness. There is also the issue of patient care. Sometimes when we look at cost-effectiveness, we look at the immediate cost of the drug rather than the long-term benefit. If having a drug available means we will reduce the number of times a person has to go to their general practitioner or consultant or to hospital, then that is a cost saving in real terms. All the evidence that has been presented to me clearly indicates that if this drug was made available, it would be beneficial to women who have this medical condition.

The example I gave is a true and accurate one of a 20-year old who has no other drug available except ordinary painkillers, which are not really adequate for the difficulty she has. She has gone through surgery. This is the recommendation of two consultants but she cannot get access to this drug. This is a time when we need to be really pragmatic about taking a decision on something. Sometimes an issue may cost more than what it seems on paper, but in real terms there is a real saving for the State.

Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan: As I said, the HSE cannot comment on the outcome of this application. That is fair enough. There is a process to go through. I can probably comment more freely. I agree with Deputy Burke. There are obviously different levels of endometriosis but the surgery is costly and painful and there is a long recovery time. I am not a doctor, but the surgery does greatly increase the success rate for reproduction. Nevertheless, endometriosis can come back. If there is a treatment that can prevent that, it should be looked at and it should be accessible. I agree with Deputy Burke in that regard.

In fairness, the statement says this is under consideration. The HSE probably cannot comment any further on the outcome, but I agree with the Deputy's request that the result of this application should be made known as soon as possible so that women like his constituent and women right across Ireland know where they stand, and so that we can address this hidden condition, which for too long has meant women have lived in severe pain with excessive bleeding and reproductive challenges, and address it head-on. I again thank Deputy Burke for raising this issue.

Deputy Colm Burke: I thank the Minister of State.

Defective Building Materials

Deputy Joe Cooney: The defective concrete block issue is causing huge concern for those affected. The process is long, complicated and stressful. Those who have been approved but who have appealed that decision also find themselves in no man's land, with no information on how their appeal is being dealt with.

In January I submitted a parliamentary question asking for the number of appeals made to date under the defective concrete blocks scheme, the number of appeals that had been heard by county and by year, and the current timeline for determination on appeals lodged. All of these

would appear to be a reasonable ask of a body tasked to do this work. Nobody asked for personal details, just a breakdown of the work of the panel on a regular basis.

The reply I received was not good, which is why we are here today. While I fully agree the appeals panel should be independent of the Minister, the Department and the Housing Agency, that does not mean they should not ask for and receive regular updates on the work being delivered. When elected Members such as me ask for that information, I should get it without any delay. The fact that I do not raises questions.

I understand there were up to 180 appeals at the end of 2025, with a number of them coming from my county of Clare. Some of them have no idea as to when they will get a decision, which is disappointing. One family who were in touch with me lately are ready to start but can do nothing until their appeal is heard. They surely have a right to know when that will happen so they can make plans. It is in the interests of the people who have appeals in the system to have them dealt with as fast as possible. It is not too much to ask that they might have some guideline as to how long the appeal will take. It is also in the public interest to know that a body doing work on behalf of the State is held accountable for it. We cannot manage what we do not measure. If there is no obligation for the panel to provide such regular updates, then there is little hope this work will be delivered in a timely manner.

I am not asking for a State secret to be shared. I would just like for the work of the panel, the number of appeals submitted and decided and the length of time taken to reach the decisions, which is important, to be published on a monthly or quarterly basis, as the affected householders deserve.

Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan: I thank Deputy Cooney for representing the people of his constituency in Clare who have been affected by this issue. I appreciate the issue of defective concrete blocks is particularly emotive for households and sympathise with all who are caught up in this distressing situation.

The establishment of the appeals board was an important step in offering those affected by decisions made by the Housing Agency and local authorities an opportunity to have their cases assessed by an independent group of industry experts. The chair of the panel and the rest of the panel members have undertaken to examine each case thoroughly. It should be noted that the appeals panel is statutorily independent in the performance of its functions of the senior Minister, Deputy Browne, the Department of housing and the Housing Agency. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage provides administrative support during the initial stage of the process, in that appeals submitted by homeowners are forwarded to the panel. Recently, in recognition of the challenges facing the panel, the Department provided additional funding for the engagement of a direct staffing resource to work directly with the appeals panel chair. I understand this is now beginning to pay dividends, as evidenced by the recent issue of determinations by the panel.

The powers granted to the appeals panel are outlined in legislation under section 39(10) of the Act. The appeals panel may either affirm the decision that is the subject of the appeal, or annul it. In the case of an annulment, if the appeals board considers the Housing Agency has made a serious error in law or fact that amounts to a serious or significant error, it can direct the Housing Agency to reconsider its decision in accordance with such directions as the appeals

board may consider appropriate, or replace the decision with such other decisions as it considers it appropriate to make in accordance with the Act.

Like in any appeals process, there is a continued focus on the further roll-out of determinations. Importantly, in line with statutory commitments, the panel operates within the legislation. The chair and panel must be allowed to continue their work. There is no role under statute for the Minister, Deputy Browne, or me as Minister of State in this regard. We hope that continued engagement with appellants will take place with a view to properly assessing appeals so those who still suffer the awful weight of their experiences can be satisfied. We are aware of the urgency of this work and I recognise the vulnerability of a particular group of homeowners. It is an absolute priority for the Department. It is my understanding that in recent weeks a number of determinations have been issued to homeowners and I expect this process to continue to accelerate as the appeals panel continues its work.

The main point is that we have to, at all points, respect the independence of the appeals board. It cannot be under any influence in any way, shape or form from the senior Minister or the Department. However, I take the Deputy's point. He is seeking pretty important and basic information in the specific details he has asked for. I will go back from this discussion to find out if we can get access to any of that information, as long as it does not unduly influence any of the decisions. I do not see why we cannot make that request and get some of the specific answers the Deputy looked for in his opening contribution.

Deputy Joe Cooney: I thank the Minister of State. I agree that we must respect the independent appeals board but it is important that people get the information, at least get updated information about what is happening in the appeals board. I am aware of householders who have been waiting almost 12 months and have heard nothing whatsoever. Their appeals went in. They were notified they were received but did not get any further information whatsoever. That is not good enough. These people are under enough stress at the moment without having this stress, with the cost of inflation. The cost of building materials is increasing and it is putting additional pressure on them. When they get the result of their appeals, they will have to get a contractor. There is a lot of work to be done going forward and they are concerned about the costs and whether they will be able to afford to rebuild or redevelop their house, as the case may be.

There is also a serious concern about the technical review that is going on at the moment. When will that be published? That could also be holding up these appeals. Will the Minister of State give the House an update on when the outcome of the technical review will be published? Also there are a number of people living in houses in social housing schemes, which are unfortunately badly affected. Is there an update on a scheme to carry out work on those houses going forward?

We have a serious issue on our hands. Unfortunately, in the time of a housing crisis, it is putting a lot of pressure on families and it is time for more action and to try to get these families confident going forward.

Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan: It is my understanding that the appeals panel is aware of the understandable desire of applicants to have their cases dealt with in as expeditious a manner as possible. The time taken to assess appeals has in many cases been longer than originally

envisaged. We have to accept that. However, I understand some of the time taken to consider applications and issue decisions has been taken up by requests for further information, either from appellants or other stakeholders. I am informed the panel has taken this approach to allow appellants to have the full facts of their situations properly assessed. A corollary of this inclusive and holistic approach is that it has added time to the overall process.

The programme for Government commits to undertaking the planned review of the defective concrete blocks scheme. This refers to the fact that the legislation mandates the Minister to review the scheme within three years of the Act's commencement and the appeals process will form part of this review. The Deputy asked for the specific time it will be published and I will get that information for him. Key here is that we have to keep that independence but time and the access to information are the major issues the Deputy is addressing. We have already given the panel additional resources to get appeals decisions out in a more timely manner. Requests for further information can sometimes take a bit of time with the back and forth. I am sure the people the Deputy represents are so anxious to get their decisions that they will get information to the appeals board as quickly as possible. I do not think there is an issue with that. If it is the case we need to resource the board further, we will look at that.

I assure the Deputy I will come back to him on his specific question about the technical review with a specific time. There will be officials listening to this response and they will issue him with information about when it might be expected.

Schools Building Projects

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Bogfaidh muid ar aghaidh chuig an chéad ábhar eile in ainmneacha na dTeachtaí Ardagh agus Ó Snodaigh.

Deputy Catherine Ardagh: I raise St. Seton's Secondary School in Ballyfermot, which the Minister of State is very familiar with because his late uncle, Brother Paul Moynihan, was a former principal of the school. The school was awarded DEIS plus status and that in itself tells a clear story about the level of need in the area and the level of support needed by the young people who attend this school. Despite that recognition, the school is still waiting for something basic, a permanent building for the children.

We in this Chamber all know that these children deserve a new school. St. Seton's was formed from the amalgamation of three schools on the clear understanding that a new, modern, single-site campus would be delivered. That commitment was given to the school community at the time of the amalgamation. Yet, it is fair to say that commitment has not been honoured. Instead, the school continues to operate across two sites and that brings real, day-to-day challenges, not only for students, but also for staff and the wider school community.

The school is doing everything right. It is inclusive to the core. It has multiple autism classes. It supports children with additional needs. It supports children from marginalised backgrounds and communities and a wide range of backgrounds. Nothing is too much for this school. I acknowledge the board of management and the principal, Ms Sarah Green, and her staff who are doing exceptional work in challenging circumstances. I have visited the school where I had the pleasure of participating in a podcast and I really enjoyed it. It highlights the welcoming culture of the school and the pride these students have in their school. However,

pride is not enough and this is not what they deserve. We cannot ask the school to just continue with these amazing achievements and fantastic projects.

We know they are doing great stuff. It is great that they have been recognised with DEIS plus status, but what they really need to absolutely thrive is basic infrastructure. I ask the Minister of State to please go back to the Department and look at this project and see what can be done to ensure the school is first on the list for a new building when the time comes around next year. It is so important for the people of Dublin South Central and for the children in this area.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Like Deputy Ardagh, I also commend the school community and in particular, those students who are attending the school who have had to put up with two campuses, which is a very difficult thing when a person is trying to concentrate on his or her studies and education. I commend Sarah Green, the school principal, and the whole team and the board of management on their work in trying to hold this together. This project is an amalgamation of three schools: Caritas College, St. John's College De La Salle and St. Dominic's College. This was sold - and that is the word I am using - to the school community and the public at large as a step forward. They were told that a single campus would be best and would serve the educational needs of Ballyfermot and the children best and would also address special needs education on a single campus. Yet, despite the fact that the planning for this started well before Covid and the amalgamation happened in 2023, there is no sight of any progress of any type in relation to the new build that was promised and the special education units and classrooms, six of which were promised. Despite the fact that parents were told by Catholic Education In Irish Schools Trust, CEIST, along with Le Chéile, that it would only initially be over two campuses and that this was the best thing for students into the future, they were told that progress had already been achieved. When we look at where they are now in terms of a school build, that seems to be a lie. There was no movement. There is still no movement. At this rate, it will be 2030 before any new build will be completed.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Youth (Deputy Michael Moynihan): I thank the Deputies for raising the issue in relation to the secondary school in Ballyfermot. From childhood, I have heard of the St. John's College on Le Fanu Road, Ballyfermot, so it is no stranger to me. I know the school. I have been in the school a number of times in a private capacity, and I have also met with some of the team there in different roles over the past 12 months. I take the opportunity of thanking the Deputies for raising the issue. They spoke about the three colleges coming together, St. John's, St. Dominic's and Caritas College, and amalgamating two sites and bringing them to St. John's College and Le Fanu Road site as the planned location for the new school building, which has the junior element of the amalgamated schools, and St. Dominic's College, which is the senior element. The Minister, Deputy Naughton met recently with the school principal and representatives and both Deputies have been engaging constantly with the school management on this issue. This is a hugely innovative, proactive and exciting project for Ballyfermot, St. John's and indeed, the entire region.

My commitment to the Deputies is that the school building project is currently planned to be delivered as part of phase 2 of the Department's ADAPT 4 innovative programme. I take their points on when the amalgamation was coming forward. It is always fiercely exciting

when the Department comes in and says, "If you do an amalgamation, we will ensure the project is moving forward at pace." We need to make sure that does happen and that in terms of getting school boards of management and communities to amalgamate together, we follow up with decisions in a timely manner.

This campus is aimed at providing over 1,000 places for second level education, which is hugely important. My commitment is that we will go back and re-engage, and I will take the concerns the Deputies raised. I will also take my own personal commitment to and involvement with the school. I could nearly name some of the teachers who taught in St. John's over many years, including people from my own community. I know the expertise, commitment and determination of the people involved in relation to it, and how they want to see this through. They are true educators and people who are really seriously committed, not just about making sure they have the day-to-day running but having the future education requirements of the greater Ballyfermot area at heart. I undertake, as a result of this Topical Issue this morning, to re-engage with the Department to ensure decisions are made in a timely manner, to ensure this project can move forward and to give substance to the commitment that was given at the start of the amalgamation process, that this would be dealt with in a timely manner. I would love to see this project moving forward for a variety of reasons, but most importantly, for the communities and people and future direction of education for the people of Ballyfermot. I take into consideration the commitment the community has to special education. I will make a few more comments in my closing remarks.

Deputy Catherine Ardagh: I really appreciate the Minister of State's genuine response. He has a family connection to the school. As I said, I do not know how the school fell so behind on the list when it was promised a new building. Let us hope we can change that and do something to ensure that St. Seton's is a priority school when it comes to the Department's school building programme. We would love to have the Minister of State out to visit St Seton's Secondary School and to see first hand the amazing work the school community is doing. I thank him again. I really appreciate the effort he has promised to make to the school. Hopefully, we can follow that up in the next few weeks.

I thank my colleague also for supporting this. Both of us are working together to ensure this happens for Ballyfermot.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Cosúil leis an Teachta Ardagh, ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire Stáit as díriú isteach ar an gceist seo.

It is important the message goes out here that progress will happen. It is pity that it did fall well behind because we still do not have even the integrated project team in place. For anything to happen that has to be in place, and planning permission has to be sought, along with tenders for that building. I do not wish to be dismissive in some ways, but given the answers I have received in recent times, it does not look like any building works will be on this site for at least the next two to three years. We want that to be fast-tracked to ensure those pupils who went in for first year in 2023 see some progress, rather than continuously, year after year, going in and being spread over two campuses. The reason they got DEIS plus status is along with the pressures on the community already, there is additional pressure because this build has not happened.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I certainly will take up the invitation to visit the school as soon as is humanly possible. I know there is a lot of great work going on at all levels of education within the school campuses. On foot of this debate, we need to make sure that the practical steps are being taken as regards the project team and planning permission, and on to other work. We need to make sure that we have sight of this and that there is meaningful engagement between the Department and the school communities. There is always huge excitement with amalgamations but we must follow that up with actions. There are particular building blocks to make sure a project is completed or started so we need to make sure that those blocks are in place and that there is real, tangible movement. I give a commitment to go back to the Department and engage very seriously with the officials and my senior colleague to make sure this project moves forward.

I give an undertaking as well to visit the school for a variety of reasons. I have a personal interest in it. I would like to see Ballyfermot moving forward as well. It is the right thing to do, not just for the school communities who have amalgamated and the school authorities who have engaged in a very good faith way to amalgamate but also for the education of the communities in Ballyfermot into the future. I undertake to visit and also to engage seriously with the Department to try to make sure this project moves forward and that there are tangible and measurable steps taken to ensure we bring it to amalgamation and to construction.

Schools Building Projects

Deputy Alan Kelly: I was very disappointed, as were the people of north Tipperary, that in the recent capital announcement under the national development plan of 105 schools, only one in the area got funding. St. Anne's School in Roscrea got funding for an extension, which is very welcome as it is a brilliant school. However, a range of schools, and four in particular that I will mention, received considerable correspondence from the Department that to my eyes said they would be included. All are ETB schools. The correspondence is very detailed, they had been advancing these four projects for many years and to say the volume of school projects announced in the likes of Galway when compared with north Tipperary looks skew-ways would be an understatement.

I commence with Coláiste Phobal Ros Cré. Roscrea has many socioeconomic issues but fantastic people. This is one of the largest schools in Tipperary and has needed a new school building for many years. I believe it has been in the capital plan for over a decade. It received confirmation it was getting a new school in 2021. I have the letter here. The school had gone for planning for a new replacement 800-pupil school with a 4-class SEN base on the existing site. It was expected this would be an absolute priority given the catchment area and socioeconomic context but it was not included.

Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed in Thurles was built in 1981 and the school building is in terrible shape. It has a fantastic principal and fantastic people. The school had approval to build seven mainstream classrooms, a music room, two multimedia rooms, two science labs, a preparation room, an art room, HSCL tuition rooms and a 2-class SEN base. The school building is leaking in many different locations. There was a meeting about this recently in the Department. The school needs a complete rebuild. The idea that you can stick some modular units on this site is a joke; with the modular units at the moment, you could stick your hands through them.

Newport College has received planning approval for its development, which will be a mix of one-, two- and three-storey buildings with a total floor area of over 3,500 sq. m in 20 rooms. It will include 13 classrooms, eight specialist rooms, an SET room, two SEN units and an outdoor play area. Newport is one of the fastest-growing towns in the mid-west. It is a stone's throw from Limerick. It has taken an awful lot of change in the past 30 years given the issues in relation to regeneration in Limerick. An awful lot of social issues have been dealt with hugely by people in the area and by my councillor there, Fiona Bonfield, yet this school was left out.

Finally, Nenagh Community National School has approval for three classrooms, staff and children's toilets. It bought the GP surgery next door. This school is in a situation where it does not have a classroom for sixth class and those students are going to have to use the gym. The Department is telling the school there is enough capacity in other schools. Say that to my wife, who is a teacher in the school next door to it. This is the only non-denominational primary school of large scale in Nenagh and it has been turned down for funding. There was nowhere for the sixth class to be educated last year, bar a gym. It was a big undertaking by the ETB to take on this school, which used to be the boys' national school, yet it has been left out of this funding. Why are these four schools not in the capital plan and is there any plan to put them in it in the coming weeks and months?

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. We published the plan indicating the amount we will put into the NDP and the sectoral plan on education over the next three or four years. While we have the large figures and a huge amount of capital investment in it, and we announced which schools would be going over the next while, there is continuing engagement in the Department. The Deputy has raised four schools and the challenge we have is to ensure that when commitments are given by the Department to build, extend and refurbish schools, those commitments are honoured. We must either give commitments to say we are doing it or hold back on them until such time as we can meaningfully deliver on them.

The Deputy raised Coláiste Phobal Ros Cré, Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed, Nenagh CNS and Newport College. He outlined the issues in relation to Nenagh. I do not know the exact issue as I have not been there, but he mentioned the issue of using the gym as a classroom. I have serious concerns about the challenges we have in the education system. We are not looking at the hallaí, as they are called in most schools, or the gyms to turn them into classrooms in the short term. That can only be a short-term solution because all these buildings are important infrastructure for the education of young people. We have spent a huge amount in north Tipperary over the past number of years, in terms of the projects that have been delivered. There is also a huge number of other projects we are doing. We are upgrading, over the course of 2026-27, about 10% of the school estate. There is serious investment by Government in the form of capital expenditure. We are spending money and we must ensure we get the best possible value for it.

I will endeavour to go back to the Department about the schools the Deputy mentioned and try to come back with some meaningful discussion on what is happening with the four schools. We visited north Tipperary some time earlier. If I had a second I could nearly put a date on it, but we had a very successful visit to north Tipperary that day. It was, dare I say it, one of the great moments I have had since being appointed. I note the schools the Deputy has raised and

will endeavour to go back to the Department. I will report back to him fully on those schools. On the overall side we have put a huge amount into the national development plan to invest in education because we believe every penny invested in education is the right thing to do. We have ongoing work in the Department on school projects. The commitment I will give is to go back and try to get direct answers on the four schools the Deputy raised.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I thank the Minister of State and do not doubt his sincerity. I will ask one question very quickly. Will he meet me, and dare I say it, Deputies Lowry and O'Meara along with the ETB about these four schools? Will he please ask the Department to do that? This is not about politics and I want the other two Deputies included. These four schools are in serious trouble. The ETB is very worried, annoyed and angry about what has happened here. In his reply, will the Minister of State also confirm whether any supplemental funding will be available for capital projects or will the school projects I mentioned be pushed out until after 2027?

On Coláiste Phobal Ros Cré, I believe there is discrimination going on against Roscrea. It is not a political priority. It is a huge school. The enrolment is dropping. More students are being bussed to Thurles because of the condition of the school.

10 o'clock

There is an excellent board of management and an excellent chair of that board of management. This is totally wrong. The management of Coláiste Mhuire in Thurles has been managing roof leaks and suspended ceilings, which are health and safety issues, for years. This will be a health and safety issue, if it is not dealt with. Newport College cannot sustain where it is going. It does not have the capacity to manage the volume of students. Let us look at the population index for that area and wonder where the students are going to go if this project does not proceed.

Finally, I am going to say it straight out. There are young students in Nenagh who have no classroom facing into September and sixth class, one of the most formative years of their education. They have no classroom. It is as simple as that. A huge amount of investment and time has gone into the school over the years. I know because I helped with it. Those are the four schools I am referring to. Will the Minister of State please come back to me? Can we have a meeting with all three Deputies on these four schools? Will more money be coming before 2028?

Deputy Michael Moynihan: There is ongoing engagement. We have given information in terms of the projects that are going to go ahead. As always, there is constant engagement with all parties to make sure we understand and deliver. We want to constantly deliver in terms of education in respect of our projects moving across the country. Deputies from all sides of the House have identified challenges that we have, no more so than in the previous Topical Issue matter I dealt with. There is ongoing engagement in the Department at all times in relation to how we can move other projects on. I will give a commitment that we will organise a meeting with all Deputies. I take the point that the Deputy has taken this issue out of the political domain and that he wants to have the entirety of the constituency involved in it. I take that point, so I will organise that meeting.

The Deputy also again very forcibly raised other issues in Roscrea, in Coláiste Mhuire, in Newport and in relation to the school in Nenagh. I will go back, and then endeavour to come back to the Deputy directly on those issues. We will undertake to get a meeting as soon as possible. The education and training boards, ETBs, are doing huge work in terms of being the project managers for many projects across the country, and I thank them for that. I also thank the school communities the Deputy mentioned, and school communities the length and breadth of the country, for the amount of work they are doing. I refer to the leadership in the schools, the boards of management, and how they are trying to make sure they are giving the best possible education to their school communities. I thank the Deputy once again for raising these issues in relation to north Tipperary, and we will engage further on them.

Teachtaireacht ón Seanad - Message from Seanad

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Seanad Éireann has passed the Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) (Amendment) Bill 2025, without amendment.

An Garda Síochána: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy Alan Kelly: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- there are still fewer serving members of An Garda Síochána in 2026, compared to six years ago, with 14,187 available members at the end of January 2026, in contrast to 14,235 members in 2020;
- accounting for population growth, this fall in numbers means that there are now 10 per cent fewer Gardaí per capita than there were five years ago;
- the Programme for Government committed to recruiting at least 5,000 new Garda recruits and additional Garda staff by 2030;
- trainee intakes remain far too low to achieve adequate policing levels, with just 619 Gardaí attesting from Templemore in 2025;
- during 2025, 29 per cent of Garda Divisions, and 46 per cent of Garda Districts, either lost Garda members or saw no change in numbers;
- the numbers of Gardaí unavailable due to suspension has rapidly increased in recent years, with 107 Gardaí suspended at the end of 2025, versus just 39 in December 2018;
- over 2025, the number of Community Gardaí fell from 700 to 615; and
- there were just 308 Garda Reserve members as of 31st January, 2026, down from 1,164 in 2013;

recognises that:

- over a year since the formation of the new Government, no new plan has been put in place to increase Garda recruitment and expand the size of the force, in line with public commitments;
- morale within the force was severely damaged under the tenure of the previous Garda Commissioner, with the high-profile mistreatment of serving members, and a steady trend of Gardaí leaving the force or retiring early;
- serious questions remain about the conduct of the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation and senior Garda leadership towards serving members in the Limerick region, and in the Garda bike loan case;
- further serious questions remain unanswered about the procurement and use of inappropriate gun holsters, and the storage of firearms, live scan fingerprints, drugs and cash at Garda Headquarters; and
- the Government failed to declare, over seven years, that the previous Garda Commissioner was provided with rent free accommodation through the Office of Public Works, that underwent €400,000 worth of renovations before being made available in 2018;

further notes that:

- the then Garda Commissioner, Drew Harris, appeared before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport and Communications in May 2024, and stated that an additional 150 Gardaí would be allocated to Roads Policing over 2024 and 2025;
- on 31st December, 2023, there were 632 Gardaí allocated to Roads Policing, while on 31st December, 2025, there were 647 Gardaí allocated to Roads Policing, an increase of just 15 members, or 10 per cent of the Commissioner's stated aim;
- 40 per cent of the Garda vehicles fleet is over six years old;
- significant concerns have been raised regarding the impact of the new Garda Operating Model (GOM) implemented from 2019 onwards, which breaks the link between Gardaí and local communities, in particular in rural areas;
- in response to an Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors survey in 2025, 90 per cent of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors indicated that high visibility policing has not increased since the introduction of the GOM, and that the GOM is "unsuitable for rural policing", while 98 per cent of respondents called for an urgent review of the GOM; and
- the Policing and Community Safety Authority assessment of An Garda Síochána's policing performance throughout the first half of 2025, found that 11 of 18 performance indicators were "at risk";

acknowledges:

- the crucial role played by An Garda Síochána in protecting and serving communities across Ireland;
- the critical importance of a locally embedded, well-resourced, modern police service, in enabling communities to flourish;

— the crisis of low morale that has been allowed to develop among rank-and-file Gardaí under successive governments, due to consistent under-resourcing and a failing operational policing model, and the impact that crisis has on the ability of An Garda Síochána to perform its critical functions; and

— that selective internal investigations within An Garda Síochána have been weaponised against members of the force who raise legitimate concerns, submit protected disclosures or act as whistleblowers;

calls on the Government to initiate a public inquiry into the conduct of internal Garda investigations during, and subsequent to, the tenure of the former Garda Commissioner, Drew Harris; and

in order to address recruitment shortfalls, improve morale, and strengthen policing in Ireland, further calls on the Government to:

— urgently publish a funded plan to ensure at least 1,000 new Gardaí are trained every year;

— review the current GOM, and where it is not consistent with effective rural and community policing, to halt its implementation;

— enhance the community policing model to standardise rostering in line with other Gardaí, introduce appropriate promotional opportunities, and increase the use of pedal cycles in urban community policing;

— increase the Garda training allowance to the equivalent of a starting salary, and review pay and pension issues for serving staff;

— provide each Garda District and the communities living there with a clear timeline of when increased numbers of Gardaí will be deployed to address safety concerns and anti-social behaviour, and roll out domestic abuse coordination teams across every region;

— commit to a measurable plan to increase roads policing, and invest in the vehicle fleet and Garda equipment;

— invest in expanding Templemore Training College and the Garda lands and facilities at Dromard, Clonmore, to ensure at least 1,000 new recruits are trained per year; and

— introduce an occupational supplementary pension to the Single Public Service Pension Scheme, as a key retention measure for uniformed service personnel.

I will be sharing time with my colleagues. This motion is one of the most important I have ever brought forward as a TD. As the Minister knows, I have been man-marking him for the last year and half as spokesperson on justice. I wanted this role, and one of the reasons I wanted it is because I believe An Garda Síochána needs complete support. It also, though, needs to be supported in a way where change is managed. I have a deep concern in this regard.

Our commitment in the Labour Party to An Garda Síochána is demonstrated by this motion. I have got huge support from members of the force across all ranks. We need to change how we police in a positive way. I acknowledge that some of the actions the Minister has taken are positive, but there are many other issues that have not been dealt with and many legacy issues.

We need to change how we recruit and retain our gardaí and serving gardaí, and, indeed, how we use our retired gardaí. For the fourth time, I had an email this morning from a lady whose son left An Garda Síochána about four months after graduating, after actually qualifying to be a garda, because he could not live here in Dublin. He has now sought to see if he can rejoin because he has found accommodation, and he was told that he will have to start all over again. That is not common sense. I will give the Minister the details.

I am also worried about the Minister's Department, and I have said this directly to him before. My worry is that I think there is a need for a reboot in relation to how this Department relates to An Garda Síochána because, in many ways, I think it is dysfunctional. The Minister has had to apologise to me more than once for the answers and information he has given me relating to policing matters. I have a deep concern about the answers I get from the Minister's Department. I have a deep concern about the answers I do not get from the Minister's Department. I have a deep concern about the questions I put in to which answers are refused. I have a deep concern about the Minister's Department's relationship with An Garda Síochána and certain aspects. I want to say that on the record here.

In real terms, we have fewer gardaí. There has been a 10% drop in real terms when we do a *pro rata* comparison between where we are as a population now and where we were a number of years ago. The programme for Government commits to recruiting 5,000 new gardaí. I do not believe there is a hope in hell of that happening. Equally, the Minister keeps quoting the fact that 11,000 people applied to join An Garda Síochána. A total of 11,000 people put their name in. Were they asked why they pulled out? Were they asked why they did not proceed? Were they exit interviewed? I have spoken to many of them and they have told me why, and it is not good.

Trainee intakes are too low in Templemore. We also need huge investment in Templemore. I acknowledged and thanked the Minister for the investment that has been announced. The simple fact of the matter is that this group has been set up a second time round to look at the requirements for recruitment in our country. Why is the Minister not dealing with the fact that we have a huge piece of land out the road from Templemore, in Dromard in Clonmore? The Minister made a commitment to me that he will look at it. Templemore needs to keep every aspect of its training for wholesome purposes, and any failure to do so will be an indictment of the Minister's Government.

In relation to the districts, 46% of Garda districts lost gardaí or stood still in 2025. The number of gardaí suspended in 2025 was 107, compared to 39 in 2018. That is worrying. Why has there been this increase? The Garda Reserve has collapsed. There were 1,164 members in 2013 versus 308 now. The Garda Commissioner, Drew Harris, told the Oireachtas committee in May 2024 that an additional 150 roads policing gardaí would be in place by 2024-25. In 2023, there were 632 roads policing gardaí. At the end of December 2025, there were 647. That is a total of 15 new members from 150. I ask the Minister to do the maths. We all talk about road safety and road issues, but this shows that commitment was not honoured. A total of 40% of the Garda fleet is over six years old.

The operating model of An Garda Síochána is a bloody joke. Gardaí from east Clare are having to cover Roscrea. It is impossible. Gardaí are leaving Newport to go down to cover Roscrea. This is a major town with many significant issues and a closed Garda station.

I hear an awful lot about visibility. The Minister talks about high visibility working. I agree 100% with him. Why can we not have it in Roscrea, Templemore, Thurles, Nenagh, Newport and Ballina, and not just in Dublin? If I walk out of here, I will fall over gardaí all the way up to Grafton Street. I might turn up in the Minister's direction or down onto O'Connell Street. If the Minister were to come down to north Tipperary, he would see how many gardaí are around the place, even in Templemore.

We have huge issues that need to be dealt with. The Policing and Community Safety Authority, PCSA, assessment of An Garda Síochána's performance found that 11 out of 18 performance indicators were at risk. That is not good. We need to deal with how we can make a Garda career a better one. I have some suggestions, because the Minister often challenges others to put forward their own proposals.

So, here we go. The training allowance should be linked to pay to show gardaí what they will be earning initially. We need more investment in Templemore to show gardaí the infrastructure they are going to be using. We need to introduce an occupational supplementary pension to the single public services pension scheme to ensure that those who operate in these services, particularly in An Garda Síochána, will see it as a worthwhile career. That is so important. Another thing is that if someone takes up another job when they retire from An Garda Síochána, in many cases, depending on when they retired, a significant portion of their pension is taken off them. Why can we not use these gardaí to do up to 20 hours a week of work in Garda stations as civilians, given their expertise? I have said this to the Minister before.

Finally, we have to deal with legacy issues. The Minister has to deal with legacy issues. He can never say to me he does not know enough about these because I have raised hundreds of parliamentary questions with him. I have spoken about this in committee with him, I have spoken on the floor of the Dáil and I have spoken publicly when it comes to the disgraceful way in which Limerick gardaí have been treated and the fact that the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste believe it needs to be investigated but for some reason the Minister does not. When it comes to the issue of the holsters and the way in which that issue is being dealt with, the loss of fingerprints, the bike scandal, all of these legacy issues and many more need to be dealt with.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Time and again we have seen Women's Aid and other organisations criticise the Garda response to domestic violence. Last year, almost half of survivors surveyed described their Garda experience as unhelpful. The issue here is not all gardaí; the issue is some gardaí and an inconsistency in their approach. We need more consistent mandatory and specialised training to properly protect survivors of domestic abuse. The 2024 Garda ombudsman report sets out very clearly what the issues are in relation to training. It is not trauma-informed or responsive. The shift to online training has removed opportunities to enhance learning through discussion and sharing of operational experience, and domestic abuse support services are no longer involved in developing and delivering training. To address these weaknesses, the inspectorate recommends the Garda Síochána develop a domestic abuse-related training plan in partnership with relevant agencies and support services.

Recently a constituent of mine, who was a survivor of domestic abuse, told me that when she called An Garda Síochána to the home she shared with her ex-partner more than a year ago, she was told by the garda who attended the scene that they "did not get involved in domestics" and she was effectively ordered to leave the home. When she refused to leave, she was

threatened with arrest, so she left the home and her two children with her ex-partner, and this was after he pulled her down the stairs by her hair in the home they shared. The inconsistency in the approach between different members of An Garda Síochána is something that needs to be addressed. I welcome the work that is being done in relation to Cuan but I have had a number of these cases come to me in the past year or so and it is frightening.

Regarding what my colleague, Deputy Kelly, said about the suspended gardaí in my own city of Limerick, that was completely unacceptable. How can you have a case where €3.5 million of taxpayers' money is spent on a near decade-long prosecution leaving Garda morale in Limerick on the floor and the officers stripped of their dignity? Even when the Taoiseach himself and the Tánaiste both agree on the need for a review, I note the Government's counter-motion has completely ignored this.

On high-visibility policing, I welcome the additional Garda high-visibility policing plan in Limerick and the additional probationers but we need a permanent funding solution for live monitoring of the CCTV.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: I thank my colleague, Deputy Alan Kelly, for bringing this extremely important motion forward. I start by acknowledging the gardaí on the ground, particularly in my own area, who do extraordinary work in very difficult circumstances. They deal daily with antisocial behaviour, drug intimidation, thefts, public disorder and repeat offenders, and they are doing so often with limited numbers, limited resources and increasing pressure. We need to be honest about every situation that is facing An Garda Síochána. Recruitment and retention are serious problems. We are losing experienced gardaí faster than we are replacing them and morale in many stations is not where it should be. Many gardaí feel overstretched, frustrated and, in some cases, abandoned by a system that is not working.

We also need to talk about antisocial behaviour and repeat offenders. Gardaí are arresting the same individuals over and over again. We regularly see people before the courts with 100, 200 or even 300 previous convictions and yet they are back on the streets within days. That is simply not good enough. It is not fair on victims, it is not fair on our communities, and it is certainly not fair on the ordinary member of An Garda Síochána who arrests someone on a Monday morning and could be dealing with the same person again by the weekend. Our court and sentencing structures must support law enforcement and protect the public, and supports must be put in place to keep people out of crime.

We are also seeing far more young people becoming involved in crime. Our juvenile liaison officers can only do so much. Funding must be provided to this specific area so that we see far fewer young people being dragged into crime which they never had any intention of being part of in the first place. If proper supports, opportunities and activities were provided effectively, particularly in poorer socioeconomic areas, we would see far fewer younger people becoming involved in the crime in the first place. Prevention must be taken as seriously as enforcement.

I wish to raise the issue I previously put to the former Garda Commissioner, Drew Harris, regarding the stay of a chief superintendent and his wife in a five star Dublin hotel during the visit of the former US President, Joe Biden. I did not receive what I consider to be a satisfactory answer on this. As a member of the public accounts committee, where I first raised the issue, I have now requested the committee write to the Commissioner to outline the findings of this investigation, to explain how thorough that investigation was, and, importantly, to establish

where the money for these hotel stays came from. Public money must be accounted for and there must always be transparency and accountability, particularly in An Garda Síochána.

In conclusion, gardaí are doing their job but the system is not always doing its job for them. We need more gardaí, better retention, stronger morale, proper resources, youth intervention funding, and a justice system that supports gardaí and protects communities. Until the Minister addresses these issues properly, he is asking gardaí to do an increasingly difficult job with one hand tied behind their back.

Deputy George Lawlor: This motion addresses a crisis that has been allowed to deepen within An Garda Síochána, an institution that is fundamental to the safety and well-being of communities across this country. The facts outlined in this motion are stark. Garda numbers have fallen, morale has deteriorated, and confidence, both within the organisation and among the public, has been eroded. This motion seeks not only to diagnose the problem but to set out a credible path towards rebuilding a modern, community-centred police service worthy of the trust placed in it. There is no doubt that the tenure of former Garda Commissioner, Drew Harris, left deep scars across An Garda Síochána. Many gardaí will tell you quietly and privately that they felt targeted, undermined and treated with suspicion rather than respect. This week, Wexford-based retired superintendent Denis Whelan, one of the best, most effective and diligent gardaí I have ever encountered-----

Deputy Alan Kelly: Hear, hear.

Deputy George Lawlor: -----stated in a media interview that "a culture of fear" had been created within An Garda Síochána and that an environment had been created where "gardaí are working with one arm tied behind their back". This was from a brilliant now retired cop in his fifties. That is what the Harris era defined, with, it must be said, the acquiescence and forelock-tugging of a number of former Ministers for Justice from Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Instead of leadership that inspired confidence, gardaí experienced leadership that bred resentment. Instead of support they felt surveillance. Instead of empowerment they felt intimidated. What was the result? A mass exodus of experience, early retirements, resignations, and a force that is haemorrhaging talent at the very moment communities are crying out for more gardaí on the streets, like my own town of Wexford. This is a legacy that many gardaí associate with that period of leadership and unless we confront it honestly we simply cannot begin to repair the damage.

The crisis does not end there. The influence of GSOC, now rebranded as Fiosrú, has cast a long shadow over front-line policing. Oversight is of course essential, as is accountability, but what we have now is very different. We have a system that many gardaí believe is weaponised against them, a system where even the most routine interaction can spiral into a multi-year ordeal and a system where a single complaint, no matter how trivial or unfounded, can hang over a garda's head like a noose. That produces fear and paralysis with gardaí second-guessing themselves at every turn, often afraid to intervene or act and afraid to do the very job we expect them to do for fear of sanction for the most minor of diversions. I have witnessed this first hand in Wexford.

Deputy Ged Nash: Policing by consent is a hallmark of how An Garda Síochána has operated in this State. That model is breaking down as visibility of gardaí on the ground thins out, resulting in a dangerous chasm between gardaí and the communities they are pledged to protect. On-the-ground policing builds trust and relationships and safer communities. Every Member of this House will testify that the number of cases crossing our desks every day reporting antisocial behaviour in communities across the country is on the rise. I suggest that to describe it as "antisocial behaviour" minimises it. It is mostly insidious criminal behaviour.

Like many public services under the watch of the governing parties, Garda numbers and resources have failed to keep pace with our growth in population and need to catch up. Fine Gael is as much the party of law and order as it is of fiscal responsibility. It is interesting the stories that parties tell themselves. The Government is falling short of its own commitments on this issue and has to do better if the link based on the principle of consent between our communities and the gardaí who police them is to be restored. The numbers are clear and are laid out in this motion. It is an objective fact that there are fewer serving members of An Garda Síochána today than there were six years ago. In the same period, the population of the country has increased. The Government is now running to stand still when it comes to Garda numbers. The programme for Government, if the Minister needs to be reminded, committed to recruiting at least 5,000 new Garda recruits and staff by 2030. Current trainee intake is far too low to achieve that aim. Only 619 recruits came out of Templemore in 2025 and almost half of Garda districts around the country have lost gardaí or stood still during 2025.

A locally embedded, well-resourced and modern policing service is of crucial importance in enabling communities to flourish. That model is under threat, as Deputy Kelly and others have said, like never before. It requires urgent action on behalf of the Government. There is no point outsourcing this to the Garda Commissioner or senior Garda staff. Leadership needs to be shown at governmental and ministerial level. In order to address recruitment shortfalls, improve morale and strengthen policing in our communities, we need a real plan to deliver at least 1,000 new Garda recruits every year. The current operational policing model, as colleagues have said, needs an urgent review. Where it is found to be undermining the principle of community policing instead of enhancing it, its implementation must be halted. The Labour Party, not today or yesterday, has long argued for an increase in the Garda training allowance. That must be delivered to aid recruitment. We recommend the allowance more or less matches the Garda starting salary. That is the kind of extent to which we need to go. For existing gardaí, we want to see a review of pay scales and pensions. Every Garda district in the country needs a clear timeline for increasing numbers to address community safety concerns and tackle the blight of insidious antisocial behaviour we are seeing across the country.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I move amendment No. 1:

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

"recognises:

— the crucial role played by An Garda Síochána in ensuring the security of the State, protecting and serving communities across Ireland through the maintenance of law and order, and upholding the principles of justice;

— the commencement of the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024, in April 2025, providing an extensive new framework for policing and community safety in Ireland, and the subsequent establishment of new bodies critical to the governance and delivery of policing services by An Garda Síochána;

— that Central Statistics Office data shows a decrease in the majority of offence groups in the year to September 2025, the latest period for which data is available;

— that, in particular, homicide and related offences fell by 25 per cent, reflecting, in particular, the significant success of An Garda Síochána in combatting organised crime groups;

— that robbery, extortion and hijacking offences fell by 13 per cent in the same period;

— that burglary and related offences fell by 12 per cent, reflecting the continued evidence-based success of Operation Thor by An Garda Síochána;

— the critical importance of a visible, locally embedded, well-resourced, modern police service in building stronger, safer communities, supporting community wellbeing and enabling them to flourish;

— that, through the promotion of crime prevention and visible policing, An Garda Síochána foster a sense of security, especially among the most vulnerable in our society;

— that our communities rely on the Gardaí to respond to emergency calls, patrol our neighbourhoods, prevent, detect and investigate crimes;

— that An Garda Síochána play an important role in the recently established Community Safety Partnerships, 35 of which are established and operational around the country;

— that overall funding for An Garda Síochána has increased by almost 50 per cent since 2020, with investment of over €2.74 billion for 2026;

— that through successive budget increases the Government has ensured that An Garda Síochána has the resources, leadership and technology to deliver on its mission;

— that a major capital plan is being implemented, including the construction of Divisional Headquarters in Clonmel and Macroom; and

— that €69 million has been allocated to further expand and modernise the Garda fleet over the next five years, which represents a 38 per cent increase on the allocation for the previous five years;

further recognises that:

— in line with Programme for Government commitments, the Garda Training Review Group is working to identify delivery options to increase the scale and capacity of high-quality education, training and continuous professional development in An Garda Síochána, and this will help ensure that the skills needs of the organisation are met over the next decade;

— the proportion of Garda resignations remains very low, with the resignation rate currently between 1 and 2 per cent;

- significant measures have been taken to boost recruitment and retention in recent years, including increasing the Garda trainee allowance to €354 per week, increasing the age of entry from 35 to 50, and raising the mandatory retirement age to 62;
- the vast majority of Gardaí serve with integrity and work tirelessly to keep our communities safe;
- the Garda Commissioner is committed to ensuring the highest levels of integrity are maintained across the organisation, and that there are robust procedures in place under the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024, to allow him to deal with any allegations of misconduct;
- the introduction of a modernised statutory disciplinary framework under the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024, will help to ensure more timely resolution of conduct proceedings and cases involving Garda suspensions;
- statutory Standards of Professional Behaviour and associated Conduct Regulations now provide clear mechanisms to examine allegations concerning the conduct of Garda members; and
- significant and sustained investment in equipment for Gardaí is delivering real benefits, including through the rollout of mobility devices to all frontline members, the rollout of body-worn cameras, the acquisition of two water cannons, the expansion of the fleet and the purchase of three new state-of-the-art aircraft;

welcomes that:

- there are 14,529 attested Gardaí serving with An Garda Síochána as of end February 2026, reflecting that Garda recruitment is now accelerating following the forced closure of the Garda College during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, and subsequent alterations to training as the pandemic continued;
- this represents an increase of almost 1,500 Garda members since 2016;
- the overall Garda workforce has increased from 15,980 in 2016 to 18,276 in 2026;
- the Government has committed in the Programme for Government to funding the recruitment of 5,000 Gardaí and additional Garda staff by 2030;
- interest in a career in An Garda Síochána is high, with almost 11,000 applications to join the Service received in 2025;
- 223 Garda Trainees entered the Garda Training College in Templemore in November 2025, the largest single intake to the Garda College since 2014, and overall, 794 trainees entered the Garda College in 2025, the highest number since 2018;
- a further 215 Garda Trainees entered the Garda Training College in February 2026, with three further intakes planned across the remainder of the year;
- 194 Gardaí attested in November 2025, the highest number since 2019;
- the Government is committed to increasing the Garda Reserve with a recruitment competition planned for 2026, and further intakes planned this year; and

— the introduction of the Garda Operating Model, which makes Garda Divisions the central unit of policing administration, has provided for a more comprehensive and inclusive policing service and helped strengthen the focus on community policing, while also introducing increased local specialisation in the investigation of a range of crimes, including sexual crime, domestic violence, cyber-crime, and economic crime; and

notes the Government's commitment to:

- continue to invest in ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the resources it needs to keep people safe;
- support the Garda Commissioner in ensuring the wellbeing and job satisfaction of the members and staff of An Garda Síochána;
- continue to provide funding to recruit 5,000 new Gardaí over the next five years;
- modernise the statutory basis for certain Garda powers, through the enactment of the Garda Síochána (Powers) Bill 2026;
- further enhance the detection and investigation capabilities of An Garda Síochána, through the enactment of the Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) (Amendment) Bill 2025, which builds on the Garda Síochána's ability to use body-worn cameras, enabled through the Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) Act 2023;
- continue to invest in additional measures to support the Garda College to increase capacity for up to 1,000 Garda Trainees per year, including those detailed in the An Garda Síochána Recruitment Training Capacity Group Report, published in September 2025; and
- continue to support the work being done by An Garda Síochána with international partners to deal with organised crime gangs and the related issue of drugs in our communities."

I welcome the opportunity offered by the Labour Party motion and the Government counter-motion to talk about the outstanding work carried out by members of An Garda Síochána and the extraordinary commitment they show on a daily basis. I commend them on the work they do to protect our communities and keep all of us safe. Since taking up office over a year ago, I have sought to ensure we can deliver a vibrant and strong policing service that is highly visible in our communities. I am committed to ensuring An Garda Síochána has the resources, technology and systems it needs to prevent crime and keep us safe. The Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration is delivering a complex and effective programme of policy development, legislative change and the resources needed to deliver on those commitments in every county.

The criticism of An Garda Síochána by some Members of this House does not reflect the very positive view of the Garda held by the people of Ireland. The repeated references to Garda morale being low are not supported by evidence and ignore the vibrancy and success of the organisation, which the vast majority of its members are proud to serve in. The proof of this lies in the fact that the annual resignation rate within An Garda Síochána is approximately 1% or less of attested members. That is a low number by any standard and contrasts very favourably with figures in the broader public and private sector and particularly when

compared to rates experienced in the PSNI, police services in the UK and police services in other jurisdictions. That over 11,000 people applied to be members of An Garda Síochána last year shows that being a garda is seen as an attractive career and a valuable way to give back to your community.

A hugely positive central role is played by members of An Garda Síochána in communities across the State. We have an admirable and long tradition of policing by consent in Ireland. That remains at the core of our policing service. It means that policing work here is done thanks to and because of the strong links that exist between gardaí and the communities they serve. People in Ireland recognise and value those links and the positive impact that An Garda Síochána has on people's day-to-day lives. The most recent public attitudes survey demonstrated that 88% of people who took part trust An Garda Síochána and 70% were satisfied with the service provided in their local communities.

Since becoming Minister, I have been enormously impressed by the senior leadership of An Garda Síochána. They have played a pivotal role in reforming our national police force while tackling organised crime with unprecedented results and dramatically reducing the incidents of burglaries across the state. The Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024, which I commenced in April of last year, provides a modern legislative structure for a police service fit for the 21st century. I commend the work of Commissioner Justin Kelly and the senior leadership personnel in putting the organisation on such a strong footing. His dedication and professionalism in modernising the organisation means we have a policing service we can all be proud of. As Minister, I am happy to engage with Members of this House, with the Garda associations and with the Commissioner on measures that can be taken to improve our policing service. I value the important engagement I have had with the four Garda representative organisations. Commissioner Kelly has also engaged in a comprehensive manner with the organisations. I understand he will attend their annual conferences and will engage to resolve, as will I, any issues raised by their membership as best he can. The Government has set a high bar for An Garda Síochána in the programme for Government and is making ongoing strides along with the Commissioner and all his team to achieve the commitments.

On a daily basis, I see on our streets the commitment and dedication of the Garda and the work undertaken to keep us safe. Over the past decade, gardaí have made over 1,000 arrests for organised crime offences. Many of these individuals have been prosecuted and convicted and are now off our streets. Last year, there were no gangland gun murders in Ireland for the first time in over three decades. This is not due to good fortune; it is due to the dedicated work of the Garda in making our country safer. It has done an excellent job in ensuring that the presence of guns in Ireland is very low. Over the same period, Operation Thor was introduced with the aim of detecting and preventing incidents of burglary and associated criminal activity. This operation has delivered a truly remarkable drop in the number of residential burglaries of approximately 75%, particularly during the winter months. This initiative continues to have a positive impact on the reduction of property crime in Ireland.

A more recent development I would like to highlight is the introduction of the high-visibility policing plans first in Dublin and latterly in Cork and Limerick. I acknowledge the comments of colleagues from the Labour Party who recognise the presence of high-visibility policing. When I listen to people all over the country, what I hear most is that people want to see more gardaí on our streets where they are most needed. This Government is committed to delivering

on the commitment to see more gardaí on our streets. There is a high-visibility policing plan in Dublin city centre. It will be rolled out throughout the country. During the first six months of the roll-out in Dublin, there were increased proactive policing detections for a range of offences, including public order offences, drunkenness and drugs for sale or supply. Arrests, charges and summonses have considerably increased. At the same time, thefts and robberies have decreased. The Government and the Garda have demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach. It is now being extended to Cork and Limerick and will be extended to other parts of the country as well.

We all agree we need a larger Garda organisation. That is why the Government is committed to recruiting at least 5,000 new Garda recruits by 2030.

I have stated numerous times that supporting the Garda is my number one priority.

At the end of February this year, there were 14,529 attested gardaí. More broadly, the overall Garda workforce has increased from 15,980 in 2016 to 18,276 in 2026. Some 2,287 people have entered the Garda college since it reopened in 2022 after the pandemic. Just under 800 trainees entered the Garda college in 2025, the highest number since 2018. In the first intake of this year, 215 recruits entered Templemore. This is the third intake in a row with over 200 recruits. This is making a difference.

As more gardaí are trained and the organisation grows, Garda management will have greater resources to increase the numbers allocated to specialist units. While the training college in Templemore will always be the primary centre for training gardaí, we can all acknowledge its capacity limitations and that is why work is under way to increase capacity in the short term with the support of the Office of Public Works, OPW. It is anticipated that additional capacity will become available this year, providing capacity for a total of 500 Garda trainees on site. While much of our focus is on the work of the Garda, we must remember that ensuring people are safe and feel safe requires a broader response. That is apparent in terms of the local community policing partnerships that have been rolled out.

There has been public discourse regarding Garda discipline and suspensions, something that has been raised by colleagues from the Labour Party, and I want to address this. I must be mindful, of course, that some matters have been before the courts and that internal Garda discipline comes under the remit of the Commissioner. Therefore, I will not comment on individual matters. It is critical to acknowledge that the vast majority of gardaí serve with integrity and do their duty with commitment and dedication. Public confidence in An Garda Síochána depends on gardaí demonstrating the highest level of personal and professional standards of behaviour. At the end of January, there were 101 members of the Garda on suspension. That represents just 0.6% of the total number of Garda members in the State.

I will also stress that a suspension from duty is not a finding of guilt or wrongdoing. Suspension is a step in the process; it is not the final judgment. It is a mechanism to ensure public confidence in the police service while any allegations are investigated. There are robust procedures in place to allow the Commissioner to deal with any allegations of misconduct in a proper manner and I brought forward regulations last April to give effect to that. There are now separate regulations for dealing with misconduct, as opposed to performance. We have also streamlined investigations for Fiosrú.

However, the criminal justice system and the law apply to everyone. Wearing a Garda uniform does not grant anyone immunity from proper scrutiny, investigation or prosecution. Equally, the fact a person who may be accused of a criminal offence is a member of the Garda is not, in and of itself, a finding of guilt. Our system operates on the presumption of innocence and that applies to everyone, be they a member of the public or or a member of the Garda. Anyone who is brought before the courts has a right to defend themselves and their reputation. That is the system operating in the proper independent manner. It is not open to me as Minister to intervene in investigations or the deliberations of the DPP and certainly not in the operation of the courts. Our system is designed to be a set of independent yet interlinked bodies with defined roles and responsibilities so that political intervention or interference in the administration of justice cannot occur.

Calls for independent inquiries for every single court case brought against gardaí cannot become the norm, in particular in cases where the accused has been subject to prosecution, has had access to a defence and has been acquitted by a jury of their peers. In particular, it cannot be the norm in a system like that which we are lucky to enjoy and in which I am proud to serve, where the administration of justice is conducted openly and transparently.

We are rightly proud of the relationship the Garda has with the public in this country and we need to maintain that. That trust has taken many years to build up and I will not allow it to be damaged. I want to ensure that An Garda Síochána goes from success to success.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I commend Deputy Kelly on this Labour Party motion. I believe it is the first on policing in the lifetime of this Dáil. It reflects our long-standing interest in criminal justice, including my personal interest in criminal justice, and our concern to ensure a robust policing system for our country. I want to pay tribute, as did the Minister, to the vital work of gardaí across our communities and the country and in my constituency and that of the Minister. I welcome the high-visibility policing plan in Dublin city centre, which has made an enormous difference.

However, the Government's countermotion is deeply disappointing because it fails to acknowledge the reality, which is that serious structural issues in An Garda Síochána need addressing. Instead of massaging the numbers upwards, as the Minister has done, and providing such a poor response with barely any mention of domestic violence, community policing or the drastic failure to increase roads policing, the Minister has given us a somewhat idealistic countermotion that does not address the serious omissions.

As the Minister knows, communities across the country are crying out for higher visibility community policing. Community policing needs serious investment. We need to ensure that community gardaí are not relegated but are instead seen as vital to the task of policing across the country.

On domestic violence, our motion calls for a clear timeline for the roll-out of domestic violence co-ordination teams across every region. We know there is an epidemic of violence against women at present. We see how many murders are linked to domestic violence, yet Women's Aid has found that nearly half of women who go to the Garda for help in domestic violence situations find the response unhelpful. That is deeply concerning.

I have submitted a parliamentary question to the Minister to establish the number of complaints made to Fiosrú since the establishment of a new unit to tackle complaints against gardaí regarding allegations of sexual and domestic abuse. I have not seen any reporting in the annual reports of GSOC or Fiosrú on this. I would welcome a response. We have the courageous example of Margaret Loftus, who came forward to describe her experience of how gardaí closed ranks against her when she made allegations, which were absolutely justified, that her garda partner had been violent towards her. This shows the systemic problems in An Garda Síochána.

This is the sort of example the Minister needs to take seriously in seeking to rebuild trust among communities in the Garda in respect of domestic violence, community policing, road safety and so much more. Our motion seeks to present to the Government constructive solutions to tackle those systemic issues and ensure that trust is rebuilt in communities and that An Garda Síochána can operate effectively and with community buy-in. I urge the Minister not to oppose our motion.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: Tá an Teachta Kelly ar dhuine de na cosantóirí is mó ar son na ngardaí sa Dáil. Tá muid go léir i bPáirtí an Lucht Oibre ag iarraidh feabhas a chur ar choinníollacha oibre na ngardaí agus cur ar a gcumas an pobal a choinneáil slán.

I will focus my remarks on the area of roads policing. As the Minister knows, 190 lives were lost on Irish roads last year, the highest number in over a decade. Thirty-nine people have been killed on our roads so far this year, seven more this time last year. We are going backwards when it comes to road safety. Is it any wonder when the Government has failed to properly resource our primary enforcement mechanism of the rules of the road, namely, the Garda traffic corps? Bad driver behaviour will not change until the rules of the road are relentlessly enforced. It is like the wild west on our roads at times. There is speeding, red-light running, driver distraction from the massive iPad displays in cars or mobile phones, texting, watching Netflix on the M50 or recording Snapchats or voice notes while driving. I ask the Minister to look at the Bad Drivers Ireland account on TikTok, which will scare the bejesus out of him and give him a sense of the lunatics out there on our roads putting lives at risk with their recklessness. They will keep doing it unless they think there is some chance they will be caught.

The Garda is essentially hamstrung on this. We have a road safety strategy, but we have seen next to no urgency in increasing the resources available to gardaí in terms of people power and the tools at their disposal such as traffic cameras. We have only nine static speed cameras in the country, three average-speed cameras and one red-light camera at Merrion Gates. In terms of numbers of traffic gardaí, before the recession we had a force of about 1,300 gardaí policing our roads, which was then absolutely decimated and cut in half to just 623 in 2018. There are now about 500,000 more cars on the roads than when the cuts were made.

As noted in the motion, the then Garda Commissioner told the transport committee that over the course of 2024 and 2025, 150 new gardaí would be allocated to the roads policing division. What was actually delivered falls far short of this. At the end of 2023, there were 632 gardaí in the traffic corps and at the end of 2025 there were 647, a net increase of just 15. In other words, it was 10% of what was promised. We need to get a grip on this. We need urgent

investment in the Garda roads policing division to bring the numbers up and enforce the rules of the road.

We can talk all we like about road safety strategies, speed limits and penalty points, and they are of course necessary measures, but unless the rules of the road can be vigorously enforced, nothing will change. We will continue to see driver behaviour deteriorate and more and more people will be killed and seriously injured on our roads. We need to see greater investment in the Garda and investment into the traffic corps cannot be treated as an optional extra. It can quite literally be a matter of life and death.

While we talk about high-visibility policing, it is great to see it. However, I cannot help noticing as I cycle into the Dáil every morning that I see lots of high-visibility gardaí in the Minister's constituency, but I get reports from my constituents and people all over Dublin that the same visibility is not elsewhere. While we support the measure, we would like to see it somewhere outside of Dublin Bay South as well.

Deputy Mark Wall: I welcome students from the National Learning Network in my home town of Athy who have joined us for this very important debate. I also thank Deputy Kelly for all of his work in this area.

I join with the Minister in thanking all of our serving Garda members for the job they do on behalf of all of us day in and day out, 24-7. It is most welcome and the Labour Party, in particular, wants to welcome and thank them, as the Minister has done. Unfortunately, however, morale among gardaí is as low as I have ever seen it and as low as many serving Garda members have seen it for a very long time. This is directly related to the recruitment of gardaí.

In my own constituency of Kildare South, the number of gardaí has remained the same since 2020 despite repeated PR attempts to convey a different story. Currently, there are 147 gardaí across the Kildare division in Athy, Castledermot, Kildare town, Monasterevin, Newbridge and Rathangan. Since 2020, the number of gardaí in Kildare town has decreased by one, Athy remains unchanged at 34 and Newbridge has only increased by one. The overall figure across all stations in County Kildare is still 147. This is in addition to 37 retirements across the Kildare-Carlow division from 2021 to 2025. More worryingly, in recent months community policing across the Kildare-Carlow division decreased from 31 in May 2025 to only 21 in December 2025. Kildare is a county that has had a population increase to 250,000 and the lack of Garda visibility in that county is creating serious problems in our large towns and our villages. I welcome the fact the Minister is concentrating on visibility. It is the key to Garda policing and community policing into the future but it needs to be sped up and include the counties that border Dublin. That needs to happen very quickly.

I also want to mention roads policing. In December 2025 we had 647 gardaí in our roads policing division, compared with 1,046 in 2009. The reason I bring that up, and not for the first time, is the traffic and commuter chaos that happens every morning on the way into the capital and the lack of visibility of gardaí on those stretches of road is very worrying. I have spoken to gardaí in County Kildare on this matter over the past six months and they all tell me that once an accident happens, their personnel are tied up for hours on end. This is happening almost every day, so we need to see an increase in Garda numbers in our roads policing division. We need to see visibility on our commuter routes into Dublin each morning.

I also support the calls regarding domestic violence. In 20 years of public service, in my office, I have never before seen such worrying growth in domestic violence on a daily basis. We need to do more.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I commend the Labour Party on bringing forward this motion and Deputy Kelly on his persistent work in this area. It has been more than a year since the Minister took office so this motion is a timely opportunity to assess the progress that has actually been made on Garda numbers in the time since. Last year, as the Minister alluded to, there were two high-profile and much-lauded Garda recruitment campaigns. There were 11,000 applications to join the force. That is a very positive story. However, looking at the output, 619 gardaí were actually attested last year. That raises serious questions around the ability to meet the targets of 5,000 new gardaí over the term of the Government or the fact that interest in joining the Garda is not translating into increased numbers. The truth is that no new or innovative measures have been taken since the Minister took office that would increase the number of trainees or encourage existing members to remain. We have had nothing in terms of the Garda allowance or pay progression. Nothing has been done, for example, to encourage those gardaí who have left the force to rejoin. In fact, many of those who have sought to rejoin have found it incredibly difficult to do so.

Last autumn, I produced a series of proposals from Sinn Féin that included things like increasing the Garda training allowance to the equivalent of the minimum wage, increasing the maximum capacity per intake at the Garda training college, introducing a return-to-policing grant to incentivise those who have left the force to rejoin, removing points on the Garda pay scale so that gardaí can progress faster on it, introducing an annual long-service payment and increasing the mandatory retirement age to 65. Each and every one of those proposals could have made an impact but none has been taken on board.

This is important because the issue of Garda numbers is not an abstract debate. All of us are aware of situations of unmanned Garda stations or stations that are open for minimal hours. We are all aware of the lack of Garda visibility in many of our communities and on our streets. Those of us who are at the coalface of communities are very much aware of the lack of community gardaí to build relationships with young people and deal with diversion from crime. We are very well aware of the fact we do not have enough roads policing gardaí to ensure safety on our roads. We are all very well aware of the over-dependence on overtime to carry out routine police work. I have spoken to the Minister on a number of occasions about how we are coming into a period in the second half of this year when, in my view, the Garda will be overstretched with big events such as those following from the EU Presidency and so on. In the past, gardaí have been pulled from communities into Dublin city centre for those large-scale events. When we have quite a number of them taking place, I have a genuine fear, which has not been addressed, that we will see under-policing in many of our communities.

We need more gardaí but we also need those gardaí to be trained and held to the highest professional standards. We need to look at how we train, educate and pay gardaí if we want to ensure we have the best police service possible. We need to ensure gardaí have access to education and training on an ongoing basis, given the complexities of new laws and technology they are expected to deal with. The public has to have confidence in the governance and management of An Garda Síochána and that requires fully addressing the number of gardaí who are working on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence as well as ensuring the

organisation responds to such cases properly. We need to listen to people like Margaret Loftus, a former garda herself, and address how gardaí are handling or sometimes mishandling internal complaints and allegations of criminality and how members who challenge wrongdoing within the organisation are treated. We have seen in the Garda, as elsewhere, that protecting whistleblowers is not always considered a priority.

We want to ensure gardaí are held to the highest standards and that internal Garda investigations are fair and transparent. We want to have a police service that has the confidence of our communities. I commend and thank the gardaí in my constituency on their ongoing work under very difficult circumstances because the truth of the matter is that, just as in every other constituency, there are not enough of them.

Deputy Mark Ward: I thank Deputy Kelly for bringing forward this motion. I listened to him on the radio this morning when I was on my way in and I was in full agreement with him that the further you move away from Leinster House, the fewer gardaí you will see.

High-visibility policing is effective. I have noticed an increase in the visibility of gardaí on the beat in Dublin city and that is to be welcomed. However, as you move out from the city, you do not see anywhere near the same numbers of gardaí on the streets. When you get to areas like mine in Dublin Mid-West, that visibility is even less.

In fact, in Dublin metropolitan region west, which covers Clondalkin, Lucan, Ronanstown and Rathcoole Garda stations, there are fewer gardaí today than there were in 2024. That is despite a huge increase in population in the area, with the building of Clonburris and the Adamstown strategic development zone. On 31 December 2024, there were 754 gardaí assigned to my area. As of February 2026, last month, that had dropped to 742. Therefore, despite the Minister's rhetoric that he was to increase Garda numbers, the reality is that in areas like mine, things are going backwards. There has actually been a reduction.

The public knows that the high visibility of gardaí in areas works to deter and detect criminal activity. So-called antisocial behaviour, which is the bane of many a community, decreases simply by having a Garda presence in an area. I will give an example of how effective it can be. Last year, I was inundated by residents from a particular part of my constituency contacting me. They feared for their safety and that of their children. The area was under siege. Gangs had repeatedly committed violent acts of intimidation and had done criminal damage. I received countless emails and phone calls and many people visited my constituency office in fear. Residents told me they were receiving death threats. They were crying out for additional Garda resources. At the time, I raised this directly with the Minister and the Garda Commissioner, and I raised it at the justice committee. Because of the pressure put on me by members of my community, the superintendent was able to allocate a four-garda team for the area. It was like someone had turned off a switch. Overnight I stopped getting as many phone calls to my office. Residents were able to get on with their lives, start living in safety again and breathe.

I know this does not address the underlying issues that cause all this behaviour in the first place, but it allowed my community to get on with daily life. I thank the Garda, including the superintendent, and most of all the members of my community who contacted me about this matter.

The four-garda team was just a temporary measure, however. The gardaí are due to be redeployed very soon for another operation, so I imagine I will be contacting the Minister again and calling for the retention of the team in the area.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion and again raise the fact that County Meath has the lowest number of gardaí per population in the State. This is the case by a long way and has been the case for years. As a direct result, community safety in Meath is being sacrificed. In recent days alone, I could point to a spate of burglaries in Kells, car break-ins elsewhere and constituents being turned away from their local Garda station in Ashbourne, unable to make a statement because the station does not enough members. These are not just statistics; they are breaches of the basic contract between the State and its citizens.

This Government's failure has direct consequences. How can communities feel safe when their local station's long-term future is in doubt, like in Kells, or where it barely opens, like in Dunshaughlin, Dunboyne, Duleek and Laytown?

In early 2022, the then Minister for Justice, Deputy Helen McEntee, promised a new Garda station for Laytown. The problem is that she did not say which decade it would be delivered in. The latest indication from the current Minister's Department is that it will not be this one anyway. This would be laughable if it were not so serious. It is not a laugh; it is a disgrace.

Garda numbers are lower now than in 2020. With population growth, we have 10% fewer gardaí *per capita* than five years ago. The Government can no longer ignore this.

I welcome this motion. In addition, Sinn Féin has published a comprehensive plan to tackle the recruitment and retention crisis in An Garda Síochána. The Government should heed both. Community safety cannot wait any longer.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Tá fadhb leanúnach sna ceantair Ghaeltachta maidir le gardaí agus a gcumas Gaeilge. Dúirt an Coimisinéir Teanga nach bhfuil ach duine as gach triúr garda in ann Gaeilge a labhairt. Is fadhb ollmhór é sin i gceantair Ghaeltachta. Ag an am céanna, áfach, tá gardaí le Gaeilge i gceantair éagsúla atá sásta agus ag iarraidh bogadh chuig na ceantair Ghaeltachta sin, áit ar féidir leo clanna a thógáil trí Ghaeilge sa Ghaeltacht, ach níl siad in ann é sin a dhéanamh. Más rud é go bhfuil muid dáiríre faoi ghardaí sa Ghaeltacht, caithfear a chinntiú go bhfuil Gaeilge acu ionas go mbeidh siad in ann déileáil le daoine ina dteanga féin. Tá sé fíorthábhachtach go mbreathnófar air seo le teacht suas leis an mbealach ar féidir níos mó daoine le Gaeilge a earcú, chomh maith le héascaíocht a dhéanamh ar ghardaí reatha a bhfuil Gaeilge acu bogadh chun na Gaeltachta.

It is important that we ensure there are gardaí who speak Irish in Gaeltacht areas. We know that only one in three gardaí in Gaeltacht areas can speak Irish. An Coimisinéir Teanga found that An Garda Síochána is in breach of its own legal obligations as a result of that. It is incredibly important that people be able to speak to gardaí in their own language. It is about building trust and confidence.

Community gardaí play an incredible and important role in Galway, but in the last year we have seen an increase of only one community garda in the area. We need to increase the number. There are many instances where the local community garda will know exactly what

is going on in an area before anybody else. Community gardaí have knowledge of the people, communities and issues, and they need to be assisted by there being more of them in order that they can fulfil their role.

Deputy Ann Graves: I acknowledge the work done by serving members of An Garda Síochána, particularly community gardaí, who do their jobs under very difficult circumstances.

Tackling the causes and consequences of crime is not just about law and order and it cannot be left entirely to gardaí. It is about having sufficient Garda numbers, adequately resourced, to work within the communities they serve.

Community safety requires whole-of-government responsibility and an inter-agency approach. Gardaí have to battle not only against crime but also for better pay and conditions. Starting pay is less than €40,000. Gardaí are competing in a housing market that is pricing new recruits out of Dublin and indeed most areas, all while working in conditions that are simply not good enough.

In my constituency, Dublin Fingal East, Swords needs a new Garda station that is fit for purpose. The existing station was built to serve what was then a village. It is now serving a population of over 41,000 and growing. The Minister is aware of this because I met him to speak to him about it in October of last year. The station serves Swords, Donabate, Portmarnock and most of Dublin Fingal East. The gardaí provide the best service they can with limited resources, but the station is simply not fit for purpose. There have been planned upgrades since 2005 and the public and the gardaí deserve better. We deserve a new, fully functional Garda station that meets the needs of the community, with its growing population, and satellite stations to serve the other growing towns served by Swords.

Swords is currently part of a large district with headquarters in Coolock. The area includes Coolock, Malahide, Swords, Donabate and Rolestown, and the area all the way out to Coolquay. With the ever-growing population, future policing in the area requires the creation of a new Garda district with Swords as its centre point.

The Minister has agreed to visit Swords station and see for himself the conditions that the gardaí are working in. I again extend my invitation.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: My constituency is split across two separate Garda divisions. If I look at the numbers on a spreadsheet, I can tell the House that the number of gardaí in Meath–Westmeath is 551. That area is 4,200 sq. km. Roscommon–Longford has 581 gardaí and that area is over 9,000 sq. km. I do not need a spreadsheet to tell me that we do not have enough gardaí in our towns, villages and rural communities. I will give a very good example. There was recently a meeting in Rochfortbridge, Westmeath, on road safety and roads policing. The garda who attended, a very dedicated garda heading the traffic corps, came from Navan, which is 50 km away. What does that say to the people of Rochfortbridge? What does it say to the people of a very small rural community if the head of the traffic corps has to travel 50 km from a major town to their little rural village? It says their concerns are not being heeded and will always be of lower priority than those of other areas. That is incredibly unfair.

11 o'clock

It is also incredibly unfair for the people living in Longford, who, when they call the Garda station to get a response to an incident, are told the gardaí cannot go out because they cannot leave the station unstaffed. That is not a functioning Garda model; that is a broken Garda model. It is also very unfair on our gardaí. Mullingar gardaí secured the first conviction for human trafficking in this State. That did not come about by chance. That came about through dedication, good policing and an absolute determination to see that to the end. This needs to be fixed. Sinn Féin has put forward proposal after proposal but the Minister needs to act on them because my constituents deserve better.

Deputy Paul Donnelly: There is not a community that believes the Minister has a handle on the policing issues that they face every single day. I commend the gardaí in Dublin 15. They work hard under huge pressure. I hear from them all of the time that they are under-resourced in terms of equipment, but also in terms of back-up. Can the Minister imagine how the general population feels? Last Sunday, I was sent a picture of our local park by local residents. About a dozen people were hanging around the place. There were six to eight scramblers flying around the park. Millions of euro have been spent on that park, yet a lot of people fear that they cannot use it if this issue is not dealt with. Work has been done on scramblers, which I acknowledge. The problem is there is very little enforcement because An Garda does not have the resources. It does not have the numbers. The Minister has failed every year to reach the target. Even today, he parrots the line about more gardaí on the streets. People just do not see them.

I will give him an example. Bizarrely, recruits are coming out of their nine-month or two-year long training unable to drive cars with the blue lights on. They can march, because I have been down there and have seen it as part of the passing out of a relative. They can march. They spend hours practising how to march, yet they come out of there not being able to drive cars with the blue lights on. That is absolutely ludicrous. They are taunted on a daily basis by people on scramblers, yet they do not have the resources to be able to address them. I have raised time and again the resources in Britain are used for a dedicated anti-scrambler unit. The Minister needs to ensure that it is resourced and that the legislation is in place to enforce what we need to see on the ground, which is people tackling this. The buck stops with the Minister. People want to see action.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I agree with Deputy Donnelly. There was a recent incident in Dundalk where an eight-year-old was stopped on an e-scooter. Gardaí have told me about the particular issues that they have that they are not sufficiently resourced to deal with this issue, which is causing danger, not only for those who engage in dangerous behaviour on e-scooters and scramblers but also for those whom they interact with. We need to see not only guidelines and legislation; we need to make sure that An Garda is given the powers that are required. It goes without saying that high-visibility garda operations can make a huge difference in preventing crime. I commend the community gardaí whom I have interacted with, particularly in Dundalk. The late night leagues with the youth diversion programmes have been running on a Thursday night for the past number of weeks. They are successful. It is about building relationships with kids and hopefully engaging with them from a point of view of ensuring that they can find that better road map themselves for their life.

I also commend the gardaí who with me have met those on Barrack Street who are very worried about the ongoing destruction of property, anti-community action and open drug dealing. There is a Dublin Simon Community facility that probably has bad legacy issues. It is all about those powers that are needed. There is planning permission for 21 units there. Louth County Council would have to make some promises in relation to allocations, but a huge body of work needs to be done. From my discussions with Dublin Simon Community, it is hopefully up for it. It is between it, Louth County Council and An Garda. It is making sure that would happen.

I was contacted by a long-serving member of the Garda Reserve. He had a number of asks relating to the absence of formal recognition of the 20th anniversary of the Garda Reserve, which needs to be dealt, consideration of a long-serving medal for Reserve members and progress on enabling greater operational responsibility for experienced reservists. We need more gardaí but we should also deal with the issue of the reserve.

Deputy Gary Gannon: The Minister's opening statement started off in a way that was almost expected. He acknowledged the outstanding work of An Garda Síochána and phrased it in a way that somehow what everybody else was about to say was somehow challenging An Garda Síochána, as opposed to challenging his Department, his policies and his responsibility. Across this House, all contributors have said that An Garda Síochána does incredible work, but that work is being impacted and made more difficult by the policies, resourcing and the inability to listen to those on the ground whom we ask to serve. That is the Minister's and his Department's failure. My contribution will be aimed towards his Department, not any individual member. I acknowledge Deputy Kelly and the Labour Party for bringing forward the motion and the diligence that Deputy Kelly has brought to the committee.

This morning, the Irish Penal Reform Trust published a report that every Member should read before they speak, especially the Minister. It found that children are being drawn into criminality from the age of six - not 16, not 12, but six years of age. When the Minister opened the debate by talking about the fact that we have not had a gangland murder in whatever length of time, of course that is welcome. I know what it feels like when bullets make loud noises that everybody responds to. When a child is groomed into criminality through physical or sexual exploitation and that child has to become a runner of drugs or stand on a corner, it is very difficult to convey the extent to which that is so insidious in so many communities because gangland crime has adjusted. Gangland criminals have learned that the resourcing of the State will come when noise is made.

There has been a transformation on the streets. That transformation is being felt in the destruction and annihilation of a child's life. The manifestations of that are felt in parks, for example, in many constituencies. In my constituency, the Diamond Park off Gardiner Street is about a three-minute walk from O'Connell Street. Such is the extent to which criminality has taken hold in that park, dealers are using a saw to cut the slides because they do not want children and families in there given that is one of the places where they like to be able to sell their drugs. That is what happening. It is happening in Diamond Park and in Liberty Park. It is not only happening in parks in the inner city, it is also happening in St. Anne's Park and the length and breadth of Dublin city. That is happening without any degree of Garda presence or intervention. It is so insidious. These are the tactics - shut down public resources and squares so they cannot be used so that gangland figures who are exploiting young people into crime

could take advantage of them. There is not a concerted effort on the Minister's part to tackle it, combat it and get in front of this.

I often talk about where his priorities lie. For example, last September, the State flew 79 gardaí on a deportation flight that had 24 people on it. Is there a Member who would not like to see 79 gardaí somewhere in their constituencies at any one point? No, the Minister's priorities were for that at a cost of €500,000 to the State, excluding Garda overtime, at the same time that police stations are lying empty, community parks are being closed and children as young as six are being groomed into criminality. Where is the focus? We have seen deaths of children from arson attacks and I have not seen an appropriate response. The Minister spoke about a high-visibility plan for Dublin city. I walk down O'Connell Street every morning, including today and at night. I did not see a single garda there. There is a pernicious, insidious level of criminality and exploitation of children in this country and the Minister is not in front of it.

Deputy Jen Cummins: I thank Labour for bringing forward the motion. Over the past number of weeks, community safety fora meetings have been happening in Dublin South-Central. It has been very interesting to see, over the number of years I have been attending, the waning of Garda numbers. At the moment, however, we are on a high where people are saying there is higher visibility in Dublin South-Central for gardaí, particularly in the Crumlin area, where there is a concerted effort for gardaí to be present there. This is highly welcome.

That is not withstanding what I hear from residents and gardaí themselves at those safety forum meetings that sometimes there are challenges for the gardaí in doing their job - that there are not enough numbers and they are not able to respond to phone calls because there is not enough of them. With the level of need in Dublin South-Central – an urban area with great disadvantage where there is a huge level of crime in some instances with domestic violence in particular having increased since Covid-19 – we have seen gardaí are not able to respond as they would like. They do not have the numbers.

I have been to visit schools which have asked me what is happening around e-scooters. Gardaí need real clarity on that law and it needs to be hurried up. They are ruining parks and communities in the area. It is dangerous. Older people and people with disabilities are particularly nervous about e-scooters.

I want to commend the gardaí on the work they are doing in schools and youth services. When I have a public meeting, they turn up. They really are doing their best. As Deputy Gannon said, when we see young people being groomed into crime, when there is a good relationship with the gardaí that can help to offset that. The difficulty is that Fagan's law is there but nobody is being prosecuted under it. As far as I know, there has only been three prosecutions in the past while. That is not good enough because we know it is happening and it needs to stop.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: As the Minister said, we are lucky to live in a country where our police force, An Garda Síochána, is lauded by the vast majority of society. I want to pay particular tribute to the excellent gardaí in our constituency of Dublin Bay South and here in Leinster House and, in particular, to the incredible work of community gardaí which I see first hand in my work as a constituency TD. They do great work with vulnerable youths. I want to state

my very strong support for increased resources in this area. However, the number of community gardaí fell in 2025 by about 12%, as the Labour Party motion states. Alarming many constituents report to me they do not know who their community garda is anymore. Community gardaí play a critical role in the development of communities and preventing criminality, particularly among youth as young as six, and it is of upmost importance that they are supported at every turn and resources are allocated to them.

I met a detective in our constituency recently who felt as if there was no support for his work in regard to resources or pay and conditions. He also lamented the lack of public understanding about the importance of good policing and the effects it has on those who fulfil a vital role in protecting society. These things also contribute to morale which I am sure the Minister will agree is a huge concern for gardaí. In the Garda, and across the public sector, many new entrants are at extreme disadvantage to their older counterparts when it comes to pensions. The superintendent in my constituency described how her pension package was far in excess to what was available to the community garda across the table from here. That kind of unfairness breeds dissatisfaction among the rank and file and must be remedied if we are to attract high-calibre people to serve the public not just in the Garda but across the public sector. I hope the Minister takes all these things as matters of the upmost importance to his colleagues in the Government.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I represent the constituency of Dublin North-West. The communities of Finglas and Ballymun have some of the highest deprivation in this country. The Minister has been out to visit us in Ballymun. I was at a community safety meeting in Ballymun just two weeks ago where members of the community outlined how there are primary school children walking to school past drug dealing. There is open drug dealing going on outside a school while children are walking to school. These children are not safe. These communities are not safe. It is the Minister's responsibility and that of this Government to ensure that children can walk to primary school without having to pass open drug dealing. Those communities are not safe and they do not feel safe. People cannot go to the shops.

What is the core of the issue? It is inequality and entrenched deprivation and neglect. To tackle it now we need community policing. We need increased levels of community policing and visible gardaí. The community says that as soon as gardaí are visible, standing there, the drug dealing moves off somewhere else. There is not enough policing there or community gardaí. We need it.

The Irish Times today has a report showing that children as young as six are being groomed into drug dealing. I know it is happening – it is happening in my own community, in the inner city and in communities across this country. It is not acceptable. I know the Minister does not think it is acceptable but what is he going to do about it? Is he going to ensure that communities that are suffering deprivation like Finglas or Ballymun are as safe as anywhere else? Those children have a right and a need to be safe. If that was in Foxrock, does the Minister think walking past open drug dealing to get to a primary school would be allowed? It would not be tolerated for a second and we should not tolerate it anywhere.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I welcome this debate. I want to speak in particular on the aspect of the motion on low morale, internal investigations in An Garda Síochána and how people who make disclosures or whistleblowers end up being the ones whose careers suffer. They

often end up out sick, being bullied or shunned within An Garda Síochána for speaking out. I would also like the Minister to clarify whether the Fiosrú investigation he established into gender-based violence within An Garda Síochána will cover sexual harassment.

I spoke to a currently serving garda who made a complaint about sexual harassment and it is being mishandled. It began when Carol – I will not use her real name – reported sexual harassment by a male sergeant. Carol was on duty in the Dublin morgue minding a dead body when her senior male sergeant came in and behaved in a sexually inappropriate manner. He propositioned her and sat on the sofa, right next to her, spread his legs out and made comments to the effect that he could tell people now that he had slept with her. He basically made it clear he wanted to engage in sexual activity. Any woman listening to this will understand the absolute fear of being alone in a room with somebody like that where they are also blocking the exit. He also picked up her phone and started sending her messages. That meant she did not have access to her phone if she needed help. Carol managed to get out of that room and waited about an hour and a half for him to leave. She did not make a complaint initially but she did speak informally to a sergeant, so that she might not have to work with that person. She well understood that women who make complaints often lose out. We all know that.

The complaint was completely mishandled. Confidentiality in the Garda's own procedures was breached. This is something the Minister should be very concerned about. The person Carol confided in spoke to the accused person and a whole load of other people in the station unbeknownst to the victim of the sexual harassment. That is absolutely outrageous conduct in a safeguarding process. Eventually Carol was shunned and bullied for making that complaint. The sergeant who engaged in this harassment did plead guilty after 22 months only minutes before Carol was to give her evidence thus depriving her of giving her testimony. He was fined, she thinks, about two weeks wages. He is back working as a sergeant supervising young female probationers and sitting in cars with them. It is Carol, the woman complainant, who is out sick whose career has suffered. She said that she destroyed her career and life the day she reported the wrong-doing. She followed the procedures. An Garda Síochána did not. Like Margaret Loftus, she said, her reputation and credibility were destroyed.

There is a deep culture of sexism within An Garda Síochána which the Minister should be very concerned about. I spoke to Carol about this in depth. Carol told me about other women who were afraid of this sergeant and other incidents with him but no woman is going to make a complaint since he is back in action with no repercussions. She also told me about comments that she had been told of comments that were being made in stations about Margaret Loftus. They are absolutely sickening sexist comments.

Boasts were made by a garda about beating his wife with a frying pan. This kind of sexism means that gardaí who are meant to deal with gender-based violence are at the coalface. The first person any woman or any victim, be they male or female, but it is more so women, or a child, is going to come into contact with is probably a garda. If they have these attitudes, how can people feel safe? Are women safe within An Garda Síochána? Somebody like Carol who is a long serving garda with an excellent record and loved her job but is now being edged out.

The other issue relates to the Workplace Relations Commission. This applies in general. The Garda breached the procedures in this case. The WRC said that was okay. What is the point in having procedures then? The WRC is where people go. Why is sexual harassment not a criminal offence? It is not taken seriously at all. Sexual harassment is a marker for much

more serious violence that will happen. If the case of Gisèle Pelicot in France, her husband was initially found out on a much less serious charge of upskirting as it is called. We should take sexual harassment very seriously.

I do not know what the Minister would say to somebody like Carol. She is still serving within the Garda. Obviously, she is out sick. She is being bullied and shunned by other gardaí because she reported somebody who is claiming that they were completely innocent and that she fabricated it. I imagine we want to keep women within the Garda to have a diverse police service in this country. I would love the Minister to look into how An Garda Síochána are handling sexual harassment complaints. I would like him to confirm that he will include it in the new Fiosrú investigative team.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: I invite the House to think about An Garda Síochána and the unique monopoly services it provides to the Irish people. Its ability to deliver those services affects us all on a daily basis. I commend our local An Garda Síochána. Since 2008 when I entered public life, I have had relationships with community gardaí and local sergeants and superintendents who do tremendous work on the ground, go beyond the call of duty, attend the community meetings and go out there and give up their own free time continuously to our community. The tremendous work that goes on voluntarily, as well as part of our their duty of An Garda Síochána, needs to be put on the record.

An Garda Síochána is a key national institution. It is there to protect and serve. Such an organisation deserves the best leadership culture. The quality of the service delivered by An Garda Síochána over the course of the leadership of former Commissioner, Drew Harris declined dramatically. His tenure as Commissioner was built on myth, smoke and mirrors and cloak and dagger. Let me address the myth of Drew Harris, the great disciplinarian. There is a world of difference between being a good disciplinary, which requires impartiality, objectivity, proportionality and respect for human rights and what we truly got, which was an autocrat, oppressor and petty peevish management style. The public inquiry that is occurring in respect to the Limerick situation with Superintendent Eamon O'Neill and colleagues, which the Taoiseach and Tánaiste have agreed to, will demonstrate a radical difference between Drew Harris, the myth and Drew Harris, the lived reality.

A number of weeks ago, I raised questions in this House regarding the case of Mr. John Barrett. I am sure that this will refute the myth of Mr. Drew Harris and the question of being a disciplinarian. It will lead to serious questions that will land at the doors of Cabinet and the Minister's desk. In the case of the bicycle gate and how the Garda National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, NBCI, seized bicycles from pensioners, will also discredit and destroy the current myth of Drew Harris, the disciplinarian.

Let me address the prudent management myth of Drew Harris. Mr. Harris left us with a weakened policing infrastructure, fewer gardaí per 100,000 of population despite a 70% increase in the budget of policing in the course of his service of this country, mid-career resignations at the highest level never seen before in this country, a Garda Reserve that is practically non-existent and a sop called community safety wardens, which was given on a whim by the Minister's predecessor, Deputy Helen McEntee, and not integrated into the policing model. Was the former Minister "Svengalied" by Drew Harris? Was she manipulated or did she act as a willing accomplice?

Deputy Michael Collins: The Minister's legacy will be what he has delivered. At this present time, if we look at the garda allocations that were released in February, there was not one extra garda given to west Cork. The Minister has to stand before the Dáil and give us the reasons for that. He cannot say that there is not enough gardaí. There were 176. Obviously, there needs to be far more than that coming through. Gardaí have retired in west Cork over the past number of years but since 2022 zero gardaí have been sent to the Bantry division. That is an astonishing attack on the people of west Cork. There are no gardaí in Drinagh, Drimoleague, Kilbrittain, all these places and probably in Kealkill. There are gardaí coming out of the main divisional headquarters like Bantry and Skibbereen to try to cover those areas. That is not good enough. They need replacements similar to what has happened for generations. Why are these people being victimised?

Like everybody else, I praise the gardaí who are out there because they are under massive pressure. I have been communicating with them. They run the Garda youth awards. It would be great to invite the Minister down and to be there sometime to see how good the young people are and how the gardaí can get the best out of the youth, including people like Damian White, Don Davis and Bridget Hartnett. We are very lucky to have some gardaí, but we do not have enough. It is a problem. The problem that we have now is that even if the Government is no longer closing the Garda stations, it has effectively closed them because there is no light on and there is no garda there anymore. Why have no gardaí been allocated to west Cork? The Minister needs to answer that question. There has to be a reason. There was only one deployed in the previous allocation. There is a real serious problem out there.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The fall in the number of gardaí in this country is one of the worst legacies of the Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Independent Government. It has enormous effects throughout society. I will focus on one of the effects, which relates to road traffic accidents. Mia Lily Keogh O'Keeffe was a young 16-year-old girl going about her daily life on a Saturday in Navan in February. She was killed at a pedestrian crossing while walking her dog. When Mia Lily was born in 2009, there were 1,046 gardaí assigned to traffic policing in this State. In the year she was killed, there were 618 gardaí assigned to road traffic policing. In January, another 16-year-old girl, Grace Lynch, was killed when she was struck by a scrambler in Finglas. The Government had the power to ban scramblers since 2023, but it did not until after the death of Grace Lynch. Today, a Garda representative body claimed that gardaí are neither trained sufficiently to pursue scramblers nor do they have the legal protections to do so.

Ireland has witnessed a significant increase in horrendous road deaths. All of us have been stopped in our tracks over the past few months witnessing this but there is a direct correlation between the number of gardaí policing our roads and road deaths. If the Minister is going to allow for the number to fall into the future, we will have more road deaths. Unfortunately, people's behaviours turn for the worst when they know that they are not going to be stopped or checked on the road for bad driving behaviour. It is true for crime as well. We have seen a massive spike in the number of violent and serious crimes in many parts of the country in recent times.

If we look at what is happening to the Garda, it is incredible. Resignations over the past number of years have never been as high. Gardaí are voting with their feet, and they are leaving. Gardaí are being attacked on a daily basis. A parliamentary question reply that I

received shows a significant number with at least one garda being physically attacked on a daily basis in this country. Garda have been on sick leave.

A total of 35 gardaí were on sick leave last year due to poor mental health and ill health - 300 in total over the past six years. Garda numbers are still falling. Incredibly, in 2024, Australia recruited more gardaí net than this State. If the Government is not willing to give the proper pay, terms and conditions to gardaí working in this State, they are not going to be able to remain in office. With the spike in costs, especially fuel costs, gardaí are unable to pay to fill a tank with fuel. I am calling for the Minister to invest significantly in pay, terms and conditions to make sure we have the gardaí necessary to police the roads and streets in towns and villages throughout this country.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I welcome this brief opportunity to talk about Garda resourcing. I spoke very recently about how the actual number of gardaí per head of population is lower now than it was in 2008, which is a shocking indictment of the system. The Minister needs to get more gardaí into the system and obviously that means paying them, along with other public sector workers, a fair and decent wage and getting rid of the yellow-pack pay and conditions that were brought in during the times of austerity. Equally, we have to provide opportunities for gardaí to live and work in communities. We can possibly look introducing a Dublin allowance for people living in very expensive areas. In my constituency, the cost of affordable housing keeps going up because of demand. I have spoken about that before as well. We do not have public sector workers living in areas where they are able to see what is going on in their daily lives as opposed to their working lives.

When I raised the issue of antisocial behaviour in a Private Members' motion last year, the Minister gave a commitment that he would look at freeing up Garda time. I gave the example of a school where stones were being thrown at the school by people who are trying to rob bikes and the Garda response was "sorry, the car is in at the courts". Obviously, for antisocial behaviour orders, a sergeant or someone of a higher rank is needed to go in but a lot of Garda time is spent in court testifying when it could be done more efficiently through video. This would free up gardaí to operate on the ground. The key element of this motion is the reduction in community gardaí. They are the ones at the forefront identifying problems as they arise and we need to resource that particular grouping in particular.

Deputy Tom Brabazon: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this vital issue. Garda resources are one of the most consistent and pressing concerns raised with me by constituents. Day in, day out I hear from my community that the Garda presence in our communities is simply not strong enough or visible enough. Across my constituency of Dublin Bay North, there are areas crying out for more gardaí. These are areas whose populations are increasing on a daily basis. People are telling me they do not see the same presence on the streets anymore. They are worried and frustrated. They want to feel safe going about their daily lives and right now, too many do not feel safe. Our gardaí do fantastic work, often in very difficult circumstances, but they cannot do the impossible. There are stations in my community that are stretched to their limits. Gardaí cannot be everywhere and they cannot meet the needs of communities without proper staffing and resourcing.

I welcome the increase in Garda numbers that was announced recently. We need to keep this up if we are to reach the numbers that are so badly needed. We are on the right trajectory

but we cannot sit back. We need to create additional critical momentum in this regard. What people want is quite simple - more gardaí on the beat, on our streets and in our communities. They want the reassurance that when an issue arises, there is a Garda ready to respond. That visible presence is what builds trust and confidence and keeps people safe. I am asking the Government to go further and faster in increasing Garda numbers and to support our communities by ensuring that sufficient numbers are deployed to areas that need them most. People deserve to feel safe where they work and where they live. Right now, too many people do not feel that. That must change and it is our responsibility to create that change

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. I start by commending the Minister, who has really grasped the nettle here with the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration. We are down to core policing issues because that is what really matters to people. People do not want fluff; they want to know that there will be gardaí on the street, that people feel safer and that there is high visibility so all of that is important.

I really welcome the fact that in the past year, 794 new recruits have gone through the gates of Templemore with many of them already attesting and joining the ranks. I also welcome more visible patrols, which I have seen in my county. One sees gardaí on the street. That is where people really want them. We do not want them behind desks doing administrative work. We want them out there doing core policing duties.

A lot of good stuff is happening. I would love the Minister of State to outline a proposal in the programme for Government - one I would have submitted at the time negotiations were under way to form a Government - to reintroduce the electronic tagging of prisoners. It was there in the past and the legislative basis for it is there. It flopped. It was costly, was not used properly and was not used effectively in the past but I think it can have a real place now because it is devastating for victims of crime to see people walk out of the court system or worse again go into prison for a few hours only to be sent out the back door and home in a taxi. That is not good enough. Other jurisdictions use electronic tagging of prisoners very effectively and we should be doing it too. I would love to hear from the Minister of State when he makes his concluding remarks what kind of timelines we can expect in that regard.

I also want to speak about some geographical imbalances. A few years ago, Garda divisions were realigned. The Garda division that covers my county also covers County Tipperary and six of the superintendent positions are based in Tipperary with just one in County Clare. Similar imbalances can be seen across the country. We need to be cognisant of that going forward.

I have often risen to my feet in this Chamber to speak about the 108 gardaí who were at one point suspended. That figure has dropped a little bit now. We need to know at all times that this Government and this country has their back. The processes are under way but I think an inquiry is required to look into how it was that gardaí, particularly in the Limerick division, which covers part of Clare, were suspended. They have all been acquitted. It has been costly to the State but there needs to be a deeper drilling down into that issue to understand how we got to that point. That should have been an internal disciplinary matter. It should not have blown up in the courts.

Deputy Barry Heneghan: My father was a Garda, as were my grandfather and my great-grandfather. I will not be supporting the motion, not because I do not think there are real issues but because I believe they need to be looked at by An Garda Síochána itself and I believe a lot of good things have happened in An Garda Síochána since the formation of this Government. I acknowledge the gardaí themselves; the men and women who put themselves on the line day in, day out. The vast majority of gardaí are dedicated professionals who are deeply committed to the communities they serve. As other Deputies have mentioned, they need more support. Support has been growing but we need to do it faster.

I know from speaking to gardaí and members of the public in Dublin Bay North that there is a clear imbalance between areas in north Dublin and other parts of the city. With the recent announcements of extra gardaí, people in my constituency can see it and would love to feel it. We would love to see more gardaí on the beat but to get more gardaí, we need more people to apply for the job. We need more support for all critical workers, for example by exploring housing supports, rental assistance or something similar to what has been done for public servants in London. If we brought in essential workers such as teachers, gardaí and nurses and gave them financial supports, particularly at the beginning of their career, it would help. Outside the Dáil today, we see another group of essential workers - Northside Home Care Services - on strike. They do not have pay parity and that needs to be looked at as well.

If we do not address this, we will see more struggles with recruitment, retention and building trust in the community. There are issues and gaps but we need targeted investments, a fair allocation of resources and practical supports for An Garda Síochána. I commend An Garda Síochána on its work across communities in Dublin Bay North over the weekend of St. Patrick's Day. Its work involving all the parades was brilliant and I thank it for that.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am glad to get the opportunity to speak about An Garda Síochána today. I thank it for its great work in Kerry. It is a massive county and the distances are very great around all the peninsulas and everything. We have to thank it especially for making progress in connection with the murder of Michael Gaine. We welcome this and hope that it continues to bring this to the conclusion desired by many people because Michael Gaine was loved and appreciated first of all by his own family but also by the vast number of friends he had. It upset the whole county when this tragic episode took place around 12 months ago.

It was very regrettable that Garda stations like in Lauragh and Sneem do not have a Garda presence all the time.

This is not helping the elimination of drugs. We know that there are drugs coming into the small harbours and piers. There is no proper monitoring of what is going on along the bay. There are drugs coming in every day. They are visible in every town, village and community now. They are coming from somewhere and more needs to be done to stop this.

What is also happening now is that there are people renting houses around our local areas. Previously, the local garda knew who every one of these people were, wherever they came in from and whoever they were. As soon as they landed, the garda usually visited them to see who they were and what they were at. That is not happening now. I see fellows - not in our locality, where I know a lot of people - in parishes local to me and we do not know who they are. No one seems to know what they are doing. You will not see some of them all day. They are inside in houses. You might not see them for a week. We do not know what they are doing.

Certainly, it is not the Ireland that we used to know previously. It is not that I want to know everyone's business or anything like that. That is not the point. There are things happening. I do not think the Garda has the ability now to follow these people up before they do untold damage, carry out robberies, or bring in drugs or whatever. We do not know what these people are doing. There needs to be more command over people from different countries who come in. We do not know what they are doing or where they came from, or if they have ever been vetted. We do not really know for sure what is happening around us.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan): I thank the Deputies for their comments and contributions on the Labour Party motion today. I particularly note many of the complimentary comments in relation to the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, who obviously has a vast knowledge and deep understanding of this area and, indeed, the workings of An Garda Síochána. Like others, I want to express my thanks to An Garda Síochána for the excellent work it does on a daily basis.

Over the next couple of minutes, I will outline the impact of the work that An Garda Síochána does in Ireland. The 2025 Global Peace Index outlined that Ireland remains ranked overall the second most peaceful country in the world, after Iceland, and in the top ten in the societal safety and security category. That is very much down to the work of An Garda Síochána. Long-term trends continue to demonstrate an ongoing and sustained reduction in recorded crime. An Garda Síochána recently highlighted that CSO figures show that Ireland recorded a 7% reduction in crime between 2019 and 2024 while undergoing a 9.3% increase in population - that is significant - and an even greater reduction in crime between 2002 and 2024 while experiencing a 37% increase in population. As the population has gone up, the work of An Garda Síochána has led to a situation where crime is reducing. While crime levels are relatively low, the Government is not complacent and will continue to invest in An Garda Síochána to enhance its ability prevent and detect crime. In this regard, I am pleased to be able to outline further supports this Government is providing to An Garda Síochána.

In order to ensure that the needs of the organisation are met over the next decade, the Garda training review group has been established. The group is tasked with identifying options to increase the scale and capacity of high-quality education, training and continuous professional development in An Garda Síochána. The group will also consider specifically the case for a second training college and the role that the tertiary system could play in the delivery of Garda training for all members of An Garda Síochána. This work will also recognise that there will be increased training needs right across the organisation as it continues to meet new challenges and deliver on its mandate.

Late last year, following the review of the national development plan, the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, secured €2.18 billion for a justice sectoral investment plan out to 2030. There is €911 million of this allocated to Garda projects, including the completion of new Garda stations. This investment will see the completion of new Garda stations in Portlaoise, Newcastle West and Bailieborough, in 2026 and early 2027. It will also support work on new stations in Macroom, Clonmel, Castletroy, Carndonagh and a new HQ for the Dublin north region. The Garda College in Templemore will also receive a significant investment, as the Minister mentioned earlier. Importantly, €35 million in funding is also provided for a rolling programme of minor refurbishment works at Garda stations around the country. I will have to

mention my local station in Clonakilty, which will avail of this investment. This investment will ensure that stations across the country receive the improvements they need.

I also want to highlight the €69 million the Minister has allocated through the sectoral investment plan to expand, modernise, diversify and electrify the Garda fleet over the next five years. Following sustained investment in air assets, a second new helicopter will be delivered in 2026, significantly enhancing surveillance, search and public order capabilities. Funding is also provided to An Garda Síochána to further develop its drone technology as well as accommodation for the equine and canine units. There has been €460 million allocated in the national development plan to increase Garda capabilities in the areas of digital transformation, technology and cybersecurity. We have seen the benefits of funding in this area in recent times. All gardaí are now equipped with mobile devices which allow them to, among other things, access the PULSE system, scan driver licences to check for validity and disqualifications, and verify insurance, tax and national car test, NCT, details for road users. As a result, gardaí can quickly and efficiently identify offenders and issue fixed-charge notices for a range of traffic offences.

Additional funding to support the full nationwide roll-out of body-worn cameras for An Garda Síochána is critical to protect front-line gardaí and prevent criminal activity. There has been €19 million allocated as part of budget 2026 to support this. Highly successful pilot projects have been operating in Dublin city, Waterford and Limerick. Body-worn cameras are curbing public aggression and preventing crime, and the evidential value of footage is helping to secure convictions in court.

This Government is also working to support the gardaí by bringing through legislation which allows An Garda Síochána to respond to the challenges it faces. The Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) (Amendment) Bill 2025 is progressing through the Houses. Once enacted, this legislation will save Garda time associated with reviewing vast amounts of video footage and images. It is not acceptable that gardaí are spending hours on end combing through footage for evidential material when we can make use of a technological solution. This Bill will also provide for biometric analysis which conducts searches of general characteristics, unknown individuals and known individuals. It is intended that biometric analysis may be carried out retrospectively on documents gathered in the course of an investigation by gardaí in the context of the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of an arrestable offence; in the search for missing persons; and for the protection of the security of the State. There will, of course, be protections and oversight mechanisms put in place, including a code of practice and oversight by a High Court judge, who will report to the Taoiseach annually on the operation of biometric analysis. The Government is also progressing the Garda Síochána (Powers) Bill 2026. The primary aims of this Bill are to provide a clear and transparent statutory basis for the existing police powers of search, arrest and detention, supported by statutory codes of practice; subject to those powers, place the fundamental and procedural rights of suspected and accused persons on a statutory basis; and rationalise and modernise the powers to take account of developments in modern technology and best practice in policing.

The Garda operating model has also introduced a number of new ways in which the Garda organisation is administered. These changes reflect the fact that policing has changed at the same time as our country has changed. Transformation in our way of life, in our work, in our communities, in technology and in our infrastructure have meant changing demands on Garda

resources. What has not changed is the ethos and mission of An Garda Síochána. The new operating model has changed the way in which Garda work is managed and has enabled An Garda Síochána to free up policing resources to do police work. It takes account of the fact that there are newer types of crime, such as cybercrimes, that require specialist resources.

Domestic and sexual violence has also been a focus of the Garda Síochána and of Government in the past number of years, and the roll out of divisional protective services units across the country is welcome. This is to say that the gardaí should be able to change the way they work, the way they are structured and the way in which resources can be deployed to adequately serve the community. The operating model is facilitating these changes so that all policing services can be delivered locally. There are assertions that rural areas in particular feel the operating model does not work, and that it breaks the link between communities and their gardaí. However, the model has realigned Garda functions so that there is at least one dedicated community engagement superintendent in every division. In larger divisions, there are two or three, each over a community engagement area.

The model removes the administrative load from these senior gardaí to other functions within the division such as business services, so that they can focus on delivering front-line policing, which is what we want our gardaí to be doing.

An Garda Síochána plays a crucial role in ensuring the security of the State, protecting and serving communities across Ireland through the maintenance of law and order and upholding the principles of justice. All of the work and investments made by this Government are making a difference to the ongoing development of that service, and will ensure that communities across Ireland can be confident in the policing service they receive from An Garda Síochána, now and in the years and decades to come.

Deputy Duncan Smith: I thank Deputy Kelly for bringing this motion forward today. It is very important. One of the biggest failures of successive governments has been the failure to invest in our gardaí, Garda resources and Garda stations. It is an absolute scandal and it is vitally important we are talking about this today.

Our Garda numbers are very far down. I will talk about road traffic gardaí in a few moments but if we look at the resources and the places where gardaí are working, I live in the third largest town in Ireland by population, Swords, and our Garda station is not fit for purpose. For one month during the winter, it was without heating and hot water. Imagine if they turned the hot water taps off in this building for ten minutes. There would be absolute uproar. We had gardaí investigating delicate and sensitive murder cases and having people in custody without hot water and heating. The conference room where neighbourhood watch meetings take place suffered a leak and has been out of commission for weeks. Gardaí will not transfer to that station because of the working conditions. Donabate, a town that has gone up to 20,000 people, is a huge town, yet there are no plans to deliver a Garda station there. There is nothing in the Garda Commissioner's plans to deliver there.

On road traffic policing, we continue to have an absolute epidemic and a disaster in deaths on our roads. I am 22 years driving this year. In my first couple of years driving, I remember running into static breathalyse checkpoints. They were not uncommon on Collins Avenue, Glen Ellen Road and Holywell. They are ones that come to mind. I drove between Monaghan and Cavan once and to Kinsale and in the first three or four years I was driving, it was not

uncommon to bump into a checkpoint. I have not been breathalysed at a random checkpoint in years. Why is that? It is because we are 40% down in road traffic policing. It is no coincidence. There is a correlation between that and the deaths on our roads, of that I have absolutely no doubt. It is another failure of investment and strategy from this Government.

This is an absolute crisis. This motion speaks to the collapse in morale within our gardaí. Our gardaí have not been supported by senior management and that is having an impact on the policing levels on our streets, and it has to end. I commend this motion. I wish Government would withdraw its amendment and get to work in improving and fixing An Garda Síochána.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: I want to start by thanking my colleague, Deputy Kelly, for bringing forward this motion, and to express my disappointment in the Government's proposal to amend it today because we very much need to acknowledge the incredible work An Garda Síochána is doing across our country. As a Dublin Central TD, the Dublin riots will be an image and experience that will forever condition my approach to how we need to police in Dublin. There was a very strong sense in the wake of that event that things would never be the same again. It exposed the city and An Garda Síochána to awful events. In the three years since then, there has been a major effort by gardaí to improve visibility and to engage with communities but they are effectively doing this by running to try to stand still. While we are very grateful there is a significant chunk of the recruits coming out of Templemore being allocated to the Garda stations, in particular in the north inner city, the reality is we have fewer gardaí now than what we had pre-pandemic. We have four gardaí fewer compared to December 2019. During that time, we have had a significant increase in population, and that is the challenge the gardaí on our streets are currently facing.

Unfortunately, the gardaí locally are accused of being soft on kids on scramblers and I want to reject that. The gardaí have a very delicate balancing act between not making martyrs of teenagers or children and maintaining the trust of the local community. Work has been done to try to confiscate scramblers but we know so much more has to be done, and there is a clear need by Garda leadership, particularly by the Commissioner, to ensure that message is sent to gardaí on the ground. They must intervene to a much greater extent. We also need to see the deployment of technology, like in Manchester where drones were deployed, to try to take scramblers off our streets.

Ultimately, when we look at the resources gardaí have for dealing with those underage and with children, the number of juvenile liaison officers, JLOs, in our community does not inspire confidence. We have only four across DMR north central, and we cannot get away from the fact we have too few people dealing with the children on the ground.

In regard to domestic violence and the very real concern about the inconsistency across the country, across the 21 Garda divisions, only seven have domestic abuse co-ordination teams. There are 13 in Dublin and one in Dundalk, and none for the rest of the country. We have to change that.

Deputy Alan Kelly: In conclusion, it would have been respectful if the Minister from the Department of justice, Deputy O'Callaghan, was actually here.

Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan: He was here for almost the entire debate.

Deputy Alan Kelly: He was not.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: There are three Ministers in the Department of justice.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy can continue.

Deputy Alan Kelly: Can I have that time back please?

In the remaining time, I want to deal with the legacy issues. You cannot move forward unless you deal with legacy issues, and there is a huge number of them, particularly in the period of the previous Commissioner. I urge this Government to read the article in the *Irish Independent* yesterday by Denis Whelan, former superintendent, in which he talked about a culture of fear in An Garda Síochána. It was one of the best and most honest articles I have ever read from a garda who has just retired. He was a superintendent in Wexford, somebody whom my colleague, Deputy George Lawlor, knows very well, and who was brilliant at his job. He talked about a culture of fear.

When I talk about legacy issues, I could talk about the importation of firearms under false instruments; defective ammunition; repair of privately owned guns by An Garda Síochána; the storage of firearms in Garda headquarters, which was a mess; the drugs that were found in Garda headquarters; and the lack of proper governance of DNA samples. I could talk about a whole range of other legacy issues. I could talk about the disgraceful way in which An Garda Síochána went after a garda because he lent a bike during Covid. That has now cost the State €400,000, and there was no bloody warrant to take the bike. Nobody seems to be acknowledging this. There was no warrant, and that farmer has never got retribution for the fact his property was entered without a warrant. That is on the record of the Dáil.

I could also talk about the fact 17,000 live fingerprints have been lost, which means prosecutions have been lost across this State, yet An Garda Síochána will not acknowledge this has happened. I could talk about the dysfunctional nature of the Department of justice working with An Garda Síochána and the fact that I, as an opposition TD, had to ring the Minister for justice, Deputy O'Callaghan, to tell him the guns that were put in the car Evan Fitzgerald was in were put in by An Garda Síochána. He did not know. I had to tell him. What sort of a functional relationship is it, where I have more intelligence than the actual Minister for justice? That whole case, that tragic case which should never have happened, will need to be investigated.

I could also talk about the fact that, as I stand here, three gardaí who were suspended for years, are having their suspensions and the whole issue withdrawn in court in Limerick.

12 o'clock

That is 11 gardaí. The Minister for justice says there will not be an independent inquiry despite Deputy Crowe saying there should be, despite the Taoiseach saying there should be and despite the Tánaiste saying there should be. Who pulls rank? There has to be an inquiry in relation to these 11 gardaí. The Minister says calls for independent inquiries for every single court case brought against gardaí cannot become the norm. This is not an individual. This is 11. What happened here was a disgrace and will have to be investigated.

Most of all, I can also talk about what I have raised here and in committee on numerous occasions in relation to how gardaí were given faulty holsters, the impact that has had on the lives of serving gardaí and the tragedy it has caused. This will haunt this Government and the previous Government. It will haunt this Minister, and it will haunt the Minister, Deputy McEntee. What will also haunt them is the manner in which they did not deal appropriately with protected disclosures that were made to them. I guarantee that it will come back to haunt these Ministers. I guarantee it.

Amendment put.

An Ceann Comhairle: In accordance with Standing Order 85(2), the division is deferred until the weekly division time this evening.

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: We welcome three people, the Rev. Karen Sethuraman, Ben Collins and Claire Mitchell, who gave a fascinating presentation today on Protestant perspectives on constitutional change. They are very welcome here today.

The measures the Taoiseach brought forward yesterday to address soaring fuel prices are not good enough. He has short-changed working people, people with little or no support, working every hour that God sends and still struggling to get by. He short-changed them on diesel, he short-changed them on petrol and he completely abandoned the 750,000 households who rely on home heating oil. Most of these families do not receive the fuel allowance. They have seen the price of home heating oil double in a matter of weeks. What was the Taoiseach's offer to them? It was a 2 cent reduction per litre and a lousy €20 off a fill of oil that has skyrocketed to around €1,700. That is what families are dealing with in the here and now. That took some neck, all the more so given that this lousy €20 will be taken back when the Government increases carbon taxes in a couple of weeks.

Last night, the Taoiseach had the opportunity to change course and to do right by these households, but instead he dug in. Sinn Féin proposed an amendment to the financial resolution that would give proper relief on petrol and diesel, completely remove excise and strip carbon tax from home heating oil, but the Government voted that solution down. It would not budge.

Clearly, households being able to afford to heat their homes is not a priority for Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil. Their actions yesterday revealed their true priorities. For all the lip service, for all the tea and sympathy, yesterday, they had a real chance to make a big difference for hundreds of thousands of households hammered by soaring prices, and they chose to leave them behind.

Previously, I have told the Taoiseach about a 94-year-old woman on a fixed income whose heating oil bill doubled in days. She is now faced with paying an extortionate bill or being cold. I have also told the Taoiseach about the mother who received a quote for her fill of oil and did not know if she would have enough money left to get that week's shopping. These are the people the Taoiseach has abandoned. What has he to say to them today? Yesterday, he told them that they were on their own. Remember that almost 500,000 households already could not afford electricity or gas bills, yet with his eyes wide open the Taoiseach will push many

households who rely on home heating oil into desperate situations - more stress, more pressure, more hardship.

Tá teaghlaigh a bhraitheann ar ola teasa tí tréigthe ag Fianna Fáil agus Fine Gael. D'fhág an Rialtas na teaghlaigh seo i gcruachás gan aon fhaoiseamh. Níl sé maith go leor.

Households who rely on home heating oil matter. They need support, but the Taoiseach has thrown them under the bus. How could he think it is good enough to treat these families in this way? It is not right. It is not fair. Sinn Féin has provided the Taoiseach with the solution: to completely remove excise duty and strip out carbon tax from home heating oil. That is what the Taoiseach should do to give these families real relief because he cannot leave them on their own.

The Taoiseach: Ní aontaím leis an Teachta. Mar a dúirt mé inné, tá an Rialtas ag déanamh gach aon iarracht cabhair agus tacaíocht a thabhairt do dhaoine, go háirithe na daoine is boichte agus ar ioncam íseal sa tír seo. Sin a dhein muid inné leis an bpacáiste a d'fhoilsíomar.

I disagree fundamentally with the Deputy in her assessment. The bottom line is that Sinn Féin voted against a reduction in diesel of 20 cent per litre last evening. Sinn Féin voted against a 15 cent reduction in petrol and a 3 cent per litre reduction in green diesel, and also voted against the NORA levy, or will, in terms of its commitment.

(Interruptions)

The Taoiseach: No, they did vote against it last evening. They voted against the reduction.

A Deputy: We are voting against something we do not even know about.

The Taoiseach: If they had won last night, there would be no reductions at all.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: We did win last night.

The Taoiseach: That is the logical conclusion of their position. No attempt this morning is going to change that fact. We put forward measures last evening by resolution to reduce the cost of petrol and diesel, and Sinn Féin opposed it and voted against it. That was the wrong thing to do. It sums up their approach. In Northern Ireland, they cannot make up their minds. Two Sinn Féin Ministers are in charge of this area. There is an absolute absence of any decision-making, an absence of any clarity. They cannot make up their minds on how to allocate the money to help people in Northern Ireland. It is pathetic, absolutely pathetic, and they blame somebody else, of course, which they always do.

The bottom line is that there is a war which is having enormous implications for energy supply. It is well documented. No government in the world can compensate every single person in society as a result of that war. All of the advice is that you target the resources you are allocating to a crisis of this kind, and that they are temporary measures. It is also to keep in mind that things could get worse over the next number of months, and that we need to hold in reserve our resources, both for the budget for next year and for making sure we maintain investment in services like education and health, but that we do our best now to ease the

pressure on people. Extending the fuel allowance by four weeks enables us to reduce the pressure on working families, and up to 470,000 families will benefit from that extension over four weeks of the fuel allowance. Most people will also benefit from the reduction in diesel and petrol that Sinn Féin voted against and opposed, and people will benefit from the NORA levy also. In the broader area, of course, in the last budget, we increased way above inflation the social protection measures, pensions and the household benefits package - quite substantially.

Deputy McDonald keeps talking about carbon tax. God knows, over the last number of years, it has been incredibly difficult to find out where Sinn Féin stands on carbon tax. Every year, when we do a budget, Sinn Féin does its alternative budget. What is in its alternative budget? All the revenue from carbon tax. So, when it suits Sinn Féin for performative and demonstrative purposes, such as this crisis, it suddenly wheels out its supposed opposition to the carbon tax. However, when it comes to the budget next October, it will have a budget alternative to ours, and it will include carbon tax revenue. It is so hypocritical about it. That is the damage that it would do. Carbon tax is essential to guarantee ring-fenced funding for the retrofitting of homes, the warmer homes initiative and the retrofitting of local authority housing, all of which will help working people to permanently reduce their bills into the future.

This year alone, €173 million will be allocated out of that fund to farmers on environmental farming schemes under the ACRES programme, which is 60% funded by the Government.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Níl an Rialtas ag déanamh faic. Níl sé ag éisteacht ar chor ar bith. We could not be clearer in our position. For the avoidance of any confusion, the Government's half-baked measures are not enough. We will not support measures that leave 750,000 households high and dry. They are real people, real families, who today now worry about how they will pay their home heating bill. The Taoiseach has no answer for them. We had the answer. We provided him with the opportunity to do the right thing, yet he failed to do so.

We see a rerun of the Taoiseach's politics again. For all the auld guff and his performative efforts, he does not care about working people. In the budget he spoke about, he spent €9 billion and not a shilling for working people - not a shilling for the people who do not get the supports he claims. They have been left high and dry.

I put it to the Taoiseach again: we have given him a specific measure in respect of home heating oil that affects hundreds of thousands of households.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I ask him again to adopt our proposal.

An Ceann Comhairle: You are way over time, Deputy. The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Adopt the Sinn Féin solution and give these families the relief and support they deserve.

The Taoiseach: Sinn Féin's solution is billions, billions and more billions every month of the year. No matter what crisis arises, throw billions at it. That is its response. It has no substance as a party, absolutely none. Whatever issue arises, it just throws money at it. That is the answer to it. That is the incoherence of its response as a party - hopelessly incoherent, no substance to its policy, no clarity. There is an absence of any decision-making capacity, as demonstrated by the Deputy's party in Northern Ireland, and she controls it all. She has made that very clear. That is exactly what happens. She blames somebody else.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: You.

The Taoiseach: That is the position of Sinn Féin and has been-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That is absolute waffle.

Deputy Matt Carthy: What will the Taoiseach do for people on home heating oil?

The Taoiseach: -----during the Ukrainian crisis, likewise, where it has a similar destructive approach also.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Why do you not answer the question?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please, have respectful discourse. Appreciate that your time is up.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I am asking him to answer the question.

The Taoiseach: It will be a long time before Deputy Carthy will ever be leader of Sinn Féin and this is not his moment.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Answer the question.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Carthy had his opportunity with his counterpart. We came forward-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: With nothing

The Taoiseach: -----with a package last evening which will reduce the cost of petrol and Sinn Féin voted against it.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: The Taoiseach voted against the proposal.

The Taoiseach: Sinn Féin voted against the reduction in the price of diesel and petrol, which is quite extraordinary.

Deputy Noel Grealish: God help us if Sinn Féin ever gets the cheque book.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: It is not Deputy Grealish's money.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: I welcome the northside home care workers in the Public Gallery today. They do incredible work in the local community looking after sick and elderly people and they must be paid a decent and fair wage.

Parents and carers from Before We Die visited the Dáil recently to highlight the housing needs of adults with intellectual disabilities. The name of their campaign group sums up the grim reality of what they are fighting for. They are loving parents who want to be sure their daughters and son will be cared for after they are gone. This should not be too much to ask for in a country where the Government has billions at its disposal. They need more than sympathetic words; they need action to be taken, funding ring-fenced and plans put in place.

These are the words of a parent who contacted Newstalk recently:

We're an elderly couple, both struggling significantly with health issues. We've been told by a very good day service that there are simply no places ... We will, sadly, die sooner rather than later because we get zero respite and never get a chance to recoup our energy. We've been told [our son] could be put anywhere in the country.

This parent is not alone. Parents have no idea what will happen to their son or daughter after they die. They have no plan because there are no options - no gradual transition, no certainty about where they will be housed and nobody left to advocate for their son's or daughter's well-being.

Only after parents die, when there is an emergency situation, will the State finally step in. A vulnerable person is then put up for tender to private contractors. What sort of a care system is this? What sort of a country treats its citizens like this? An bhfuil aon rud á dhéanamh ag an Taoiseach chun é seo a shocrú? What will the Taoiseach do to fix this?

When I raised this with the Tánaiste in February, he admitted there had not been enough progress. "Not enough progress" is a monumental understatement. The disability capacity review in 2021 identified the need for an additional 3,900 residential places just to catch up with pre-recession levels. Four years later, we still have thousands of families where elderly parents are working as full-time carers in their 70s, 80s and even 90s - four years of record budgets and little to show for it. When a parent dies, an adult with an intellectual disability is left stranded. They will lose their mum or dad, their carer, their advocate, their home and their community, all at the same time.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: This is incredibly traumatic and distressing.

An Ceann Comhairle: Time is up, Deputy. The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: This is cruel. There needs to be ring-fenced funding in next year's budget to build enough new residential places for adults with intellectual disabilities.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy O'Callaghan, your time is up.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: Taoiseach, will you commit to doing this?

An Ceann Comhairle: It is unacceptable to be that length over time.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising a very important issue. I met with the Before We Die campaign well over a month ago in Cork and listened intently to what they had to say about their personal situations. Their personal situations could be amplified with many more. There are 1,389 active applications for residential services, with 281 assessed as priority 1. We are investing and there are investment plans in the current budget, with an extra 20% to create additional places in new residential developments and so forth. I have put it on the agenda of the next Cabinet subcommittee on disability because it involves more than just the allocation of funding, though we will have to allocate funding.

How this has evolved is unacceptable. The focus is on emergency solutions all the time. Many elderly parents are very distressed and anxious, understandably so, about what will happen to their loved ones if they pass from this life.

There needs to be proper co-ordination between section 39 providers, local authorities, the State, the Government and the Departments of disability and health. The Minister of State, Deputy Higgins, and the HSE met with the group last week. The Minister, Deputy Foley, also met with the group. What is happening at the moment is there is a siloed approach to understanding the overall housing needs of adults with intellectual disability. It is not just about what we might traditionally call residential places; there must be a much more holistic approach. In some instances, people are being sent to local authorities to apply for housing in the ordinary way. That is not good enough.

With any application for housing from someone with an intellectual disability, there is a continuum. Some will need some levels of support and others will need greater levels of support. It cannot be a siloed approach saying it is a local authority problem or challenge. It is not. It has to be one where the care aspects are integrated with the housing solution. That is where I want to take this. It will take a bit of reorganisation in terms of how Government operates, as well as local government, section 39 providers and everybody involved here. The priority has to be on those waiting. Over the last number of years, there has been a huge investment in decongregation, which has taken up lot of resources. We need to work through the prioritisation of those in need.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Taoiseach. You will come back in. I call Deputy O'Callaghan.

The Taoiseach: In my view, those most in need are those without housing and whose parents are getting older.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: I welcome the fact the Taoiseach recognises this needs to be addressed. Losing your mum or dad, your carer, your advocate, your home and your community at the same time is incredibly traumatic.

For people then potentially to be offered a place hundreds of miles away from where they have lived all their life and everything they have ever known is deeply inhumane. That cannot continue and the Taoiseach must act on it. Will he commit sufficient funding that is ring-fenced to address this? I welcome the other approaches that are being taken but funding must be ring-fenced to address this issue. Will he commit to that?

The Taoiseach: Certainly, as I said, this is an issue I am going to deal with personally, as Taoiseach, with the Minister, Deputy Foley, the Minister of State, Deputy Higgins, and others, including the Minister for Health. It needs an integrated response, without question. We certainly will provide the necessary funding but, again, we have to get the design and the structures right. In my view, there is funding available within housing in a lot of instances but it cannot be that we just pass it over to the local authority to deal with. It is not a sustainable or proper response to say it is somebody else's problem.

There have been capacity issues within section 39 bodies in terms of dealing with this housing and residential issue. We need to engage with the different authorities and bodies responsible and get moving on it. We must engage proactively with local authorities to say we want particular cases dealt with and particular priorities set. That needs to be done in a proactive way as opposed to dealing with an issue when it becomes an emergency.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Taoiseach. Further engagement is certainly required.

The Taoiseach: The HSE has to be involved in that process as well.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The ambulance service is absolutely essential. Paramedics are the first on the scene and they do incredible work, as I know from my own personal experience. However, this week, we have seen further reports of a misogynistic and toxic culture in the National Ambulance Service, NAS. Will the Taoiseach investigate this issue?

I have spoken to Kathy - that is not her real name - who has reported a paramedic who drugged, sexually assaulted, coercively controlled and raped her on multiple occasions. He apparently stole controlled drugs, namely, midazolam, which is a strong sedative, and Pentrox, a powerful painkiller, which he used against her. Despite the NAS being fully aware for over a year of a rape investigation into this man, he was recently promoted into a senior position in the service. For years, this predator has sexually harassed without consequence. At least five women suffered misconduct from him, including one he locked in a shed. Four women contacted their line managers but their complaints were not progressed.

Kathy could have been spared the horrific ordeal she has endured over a period of time at the hands of this person had the complaints procedures and sexual harassment policies in the National Ambulance Service worked. It seems a bit like what happened in the church, with offenders being moved from base to base after complaints. Paramedics are the first to the scene of emergencies. They may be on their own with very vulnerable people for a long time. A

sexual predator with authority and access to drugs is a very dangerous mix. Will the Taoiseach investigate why the HSE has promoted this man and why the procedures are failing?

In July 2025, *The Journal Investigates* did a survey on this issue. It found that in the past five years, 85 complaints were raised with NAS management about bullying and sexual harassment. Only ten of those complaints made it to disciplinary level. In 2020 alone, there were 20 complaints. The National Ambulance Service Representative Association, NASRA, has called for an independent inquiry into the service and into these issues. In a survey of NAS staff in the north east in May 2025, 56 out of 65 women responded. One in two had experienced sexual harassment, comments or unwanted touching by ambulance personnel. One told of how a paramedic made the comment, "If you need a hand with the breastfeeding, let me know". Others experienced unwanted physical contact. One woman, Hope, who has ten years' experience in the service, was dry-humped by a male colleague. No woman should have to put up with this in the workplace and, in addition, this behaviour is a danger to the general public. Why is it being allowed? Will the Government set up an independent investigation into the ambulance service?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this very serious issue in the House. I do not have the full background to the case to hand. I have read some reports in the media in respect of it. Clearly, I do not want to prejudice anything that may be in train but it is very difficult to comprehend how somebody against whom these complaints and charges have been made could be promoted. I do not have the full background to the case but it is extremely difficult to comprehend.

No woman should have to suffer such harassment or suffer, as in this case, sedation and rape. The Deputy is correct that there absolutely should be a zero-tolerance approach within the ambulance service to misogyny, sexual harassment and the undermining of women in any shape or form in their daily work. I will ask the Minister for Health to apprise me of the background to this case and also, if necessary, to initiate a review into it. Without having the specific details of, or background to, the case, one would expect there to be norms and protocols within an organisation like the National Ambulance Service whereby when allegations of such a severe nature are made, certain actions would automatically follow.

These matters are being investigated. It would seem to be highly unusual in the public service that someone would be promoted while such substantive and serious allegations remain to be investigated. Given the gravity of what has been alleged and that it seems, from what the Deputy has said, that others have also suffered at the hands of this individual, promoting a person in that context would, in my view, represent an outlier in terms of how the public service more generally deals with situations like this when they arise. I will ask the Minister to get back to me and to the Deputy in respect of this issue.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: To be clear, I highlighted a particular case but this is not about one case, as shown by the statistics I gave, the survey that was done in the north east and *The Journal Investigates* findings. This has been going on for more than a year. It is time for the Minister for Health to intervene. An Garda Síochána, the health service and the Army should not be safe havens for perpetrators. Unfortunately, the policies that are designed to deal with complaints of sexual harassment and violence are failing utterly to do so. Neither internal procedures nor the Workplace Relations Commission, WRC, are really holding perpetrators to

account. In fact, the complainants, who often are women, are the people who end up suffering in their career, in their education, as we saw with the case in UCD, or in terms of their health. In the Private Members' debate earlier, I referred to a case where a garda made a complaint of sexual harassment against a colleague. The sergeant is working away and she is off sick.

We need intervention in relation to sexual harassment. It should be a criminal offence, not just something that is dealt with through the Employment Appeals Tribunal. We need action now.

The Taoiseach: Fundamentally, in any organisation, it is about the culture. In all of the work that has been done within the Defence Forces, the one word that kept emerging in terms of all the analysis, inquiries and so on was "culture". There are numerous policies in respect of these issues but the biggest difficulty and challenge is around culture. Changes are occurring in the Defence Forces, which should be acknowledged given what has happened, and also within An Garda Síochána. Interestingly, there was a lot of resistance from those organisations to utilisation of the word "culture" and to highlighting the fact there is a problem with the culture. There was a lot of resistance at times to even articulating that in any documents pertaining to the Defence Forces. That has been my experience. To me, however, culture is the fundamental issue that underpins behaviour like this occurring on a regular basis.

It is something that has to be worked on on a consistent, constant basis to change the culture of organisations. I will revert to the Deputy.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The price of home heating oil has shot up by 85% in recent weeks. Last month, the price of 1,000 litres of home heating oil was about €950. This week is retailing for €1,750. This country saw the biggest increase in home heating oil in the whole of the EU. Very few families have the colour of €1,750 lying around the house. Hard-working families, nurses, teachers, gardaí and small business owners simply do not have that money available at any one time. One nurse contacted my office and said she has not been able to refuel her home because of the price of it and her family is simply going to bed early to keep warm at night-time. She said that the family do not smoke or drink. They do not go out and do not get takeaways. She said she is embarrassed because she cannot afford the basic necessities for her children at the moment.

She is not alone. At the moment about 2 million people across the country are dependent on home heating oil. In the likes of counties Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim, there is no connection at all to the national gas grid and as a result, many of these homes are locked into that fuel source. What did the Government do for these families? It took 2 cent off a litre of home heating oil. In the jaws of an energy crisis when home heating oil has increased to record levels, the Government's amazing solution to this has been to drop the price of a litre of home heating oil by 2 cent. A fill has gone from €1,750 to €1,730. It is an atrocious insult to hard-working families in this country. It is an absolute disgrace but it is not the full picture either here because in a few weeks, the Government plans to raise the price of a litre of home heating oil by 2 cent. In the teeth of this hardship on families, the net results of its tax actions in a month will be to marginally increase the tax on home heating oil in this country.

Families are crushed by this energy crisis. Small businesses are going to the wall. Carers cannot afford to drive to mind the people they care for. Workers cannot fill their tanks to get

to work. Farmers are actually seeing their costs spike while the price of their produce is falling, and the Government's policy is to increase the net tax on home heating oil. The heart of the problem here is that the Government's plan is to increase taxes on fuel. For sure, the war in Iran has accelerated hardship on families but the Government was taking 65% in tax on a litre of petrol and diesel before the war. Some 320,000 families were in energy arrears before the war. The price of electricity in this country was at the highest in Europe before the war. The painful reality is the Government is tax gouging families. The question I have for the Taoiseach is: will the Government cut carbon tax on home heating oil?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy's assessment is not correct in the sense that he ignored the extension of the fuel allowance for four weeks, which will help about 470,000 people to deal with the rise in the price of home heating oil. There is no doubt that there is huge pressure on families and people across the country. The price of home heating oil has increased very significantly because of the war, not because of what the Government did. The price shock that is occurring because of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz as well as the bombing of gas and oil installations in Iran and in the Gulf states. That is the fundamental cause of the current crisis. It still has not reached the levels that we reached at the time of the Russian invasion of Ukraine when we also had an oil price and energy crisis.

Government has to act. This is March and we have another winter to come. We do not quite know what is around the corner and what measures might be required from Government in response to potentially a further deterioration in the future. Hopefully this war ends very quickly; it should end very quickly. That is what we want but we do not know what might happen in respect of that. We also have to prepare for a budget and keep our resources in reserve.

I know the Deputy is against the carbon tax; I think he would abolish it in total.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: When prices are surging it is not-----

The Taoiseach: Yes, he would. Honesty is what we want here because the Government would then need to find €1 billion to do what the Deputy wants us to do. That means taking money from farmers. It means taking money from the retrofitting programme because we would not be able to do the retrofitting programme without it. The retrofitting programme helps people to reduce their costs over time and is a far more effective energy-efficient approach to the allocation of resources. About €173 million this year will come from that fund and go to farmers across the country. The Opposition will say, "Don't do that. Find the money elsewhere." We also have to try to invest in education, health, children and disability for the next budget. We want to maintain existing levels of public service but also increase them. This morning, we announced the DEIS plus scheme, which allocated further resources to the schools most in need and with huge challenges. It affects about 120 schools and also provides more home-school liaison. We want to make a reserve to make sure we improve services for everybody in the country.

Yesterday's allocation of about €250 million is probably the largest package across Europe. The fuel allowance is a good, targeted measure that helps about 470,000 families, which will help them with their home heating oil expenses. The general reduction in petrol and diesel

prices will definitely help families across the length and breadth of the country. We also have the reduction in the NORA levy. The Deputy cannot just isolate one from the other; they will all help to some degree.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: First, working families do not get the fuel allowance. The working families that I am talking about who are in energy crisis at the moment are suffering significantly from this. Second, the war in Iran is a shocking situation, which has had an enormous effect on the price of fuel but Government taxes have a larger effect on the price of fuel. The majority of the price of diesel, 65%, comes from taxes at the moment. The Taoiseach spoke about the Government's €250 million package. He should look at it like this. The Government has actually taken in about €140 million in extra taxes because of VAT going up on the higher prices in the past four weeks. Carbon taxes will take in an extra €160 million over the rest of the year. When the two are put together, the Government's package is smaller than the extra taxes it will take this year. That is an incredible situation. It does not need the carbon taxes at the moment to retrofit. It squirrelled away €10 billion in windfall taxes last year. The Government could use some of that money to invest in retrofitting homes to bring down the cost of deep retrofitting from €40,000 to a lower amount so that people could actually afford it.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is wrong in his assessment of the Government's increase in revenue.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: It is €40 million a week.

The Taoiseach: That is absolutely wrong. The Deputy is raising the general issue of taxation overall. He cannot have both ways. What he is really advocating for is a cut in public services.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: No.

The Taoiseach: Of course he is because if you reduce taxes on one front, you are reducing your revenue and resources to pay for public services in education, health-----

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Fuel taxes are not progressive and hurt low-income families most.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach, without interruption.

The Taoiseach: However, they are a revenue source. The Deputy would either increase income tax or increase taxes elsewhere – he should tell us what he would do - to offset-----

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Progressive taxes.

The Taoiseach: -----the significant reduction in excise duty that he is proposing because he would have to find the money from somewhere. We cannot have everything we want. We cannot have our cake and eat it, which seems to be the Deputy's response. The Government is targeting its resources and 50,000 extra families on the working family payment are in receipt

of the fuel allowance. We introduced that in the latest budget and they will gain from the extension of the fuel allowance. He is wrong in saying that working families will not benefit from that.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Taoiseach knows that most working families are not in receipt of that.

Ceisteanna ó na Comhalkaí Eile - Other Members' Questions

Deputy Joe Cooney: I want to raise an issue that is a real worry for people, not just in County Clare but across the country. I hear every day from older people and their families who are struggling to get home care or a place in a nursing home. Clare has the longest home-support waiting list per person in the country. Even though the Government is spending more on home support nationally, Clare is not getting its fair share. This needs to be fixed so waiting times can be brought down quickly.

Because of this, more people are going into nursing homes, unfortunately, but nursing homes in the county are also under severe pressure. Private and voluntary homes, which provide most of the beds in rural counties like Clare, face real financial problems. The fair deal rate does not match the rising cost of care, unfortunately, and smaller rural homes are struggling the most. People in Clare are stuck with a problem. There are not enough carers to let them stay at home and there are unfortunately not enough nursing home beds available for those people to go into. Families are under huge pressure. People in Clare want to grow old at home where possible and have dignified care in a nursing home when the time comes. The Government has the power and the vision to make that happen. I ask that Clare be not left behind. Will the Taoiseach commit to a plan to increase home support in counties like Clare where waiting lists are the longest and putting serious pressure on families? Will he commit to providing support for existing rural nursing homes so they can cope with the rising demand and encourage new entrants into the market to ensure there are enough beds into the future?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this very important issue. It is fair to say that we are ageing as a society. Our lifespan has improved dramatically compared to 20 years ago. Irish lifespan has increased more than most in the European Union, which is a good thing for all of us, potentially. On the other hand, it creates more challenges in terms of care costs, health costs and so on. Every year, there are substantial increases in the budget as we try to provide for an ageing population. The budget for home support in 2026 is the largest ever at €914 million. That is an increase of over 87% on 2020. That illustrates how services are expanding to meet the needs of a population that is ageing and living longer. That investment will see additional support, and complex home support hours will increase to approximately 26.7 million. That will support about 62,000 people by year end.

In the Clare and Limerick county integrated healthcare area, in 2025, 1.38 million hours of home support were delivered. That exceeded the target of 1.35 million hours and represented an increase of over 500,000 since 2024, just two years ago. That is a massive increase in the number of hours we are providing. The Deputy is correct, however, that there are still

challenges. There are about 694 people on the waiting list for home support services in the Clare and Limerick county integrated area, down from 748.

The service has expanded so much that there has been a challenge in recruiting home carers. The HSE, private providers and others have undertaken a lot of external overseas recruitment initiatives endeavouring to get more in. That is an international challenge. A strategic workforce advisory group on home carers is working with the Department of Health on exploring options. We are also using assistive technology in home support initiatives to directly address rural home support provision. The Health (Amendment) (Home Support Providers) Bill 2025 has passed Second Stage. That will improve the regulation of the sector. More importantly, it is the first step in ensuring that home care will be provided in the context of a statutory home care scheme. We are also providing additional funding to meals on wheels, with about 3.3 million meals a year being provided. A total of 313 day centres will be resourced to support nearly 16,000 people in 2026.

I might respond to the Deputy's comment on the fair deal scheme after the supplementary question.

Deputy Joe Cooney: I thank the Taoiseach. Clare is a county with one of the fastest growing older populations and avoiding serious challenges for those elderly people is very important. Its rural nature and the remoteness of many of its areas are especially challenging to provide home help to older people, given the travelling distance. In addition, support for more home help and nursing homes in Clare would help in a big way to alleviate the overcrowding in UHL. I am aware of families who have been told patients in the hospital could have to travel, 30, 40 or 50 miles to get a nursing home bed, which is not good enough for those families and those people. It is a serious concern and a serious issue in our county and it needs to be addressed. We have a rural county and we have serious problems as regards the elderly, nursing homes and home help.

The Taoiseach: I fully appreciate the Deputy's advocacy for his home county. In terms of home care, day care and meals on wheels, there are very significant extended resources all working together and they are particularly effective in rural areas. I am sure the Deputy will agree what is needed is additional resources, particularly in County Clare. That is what he is advocating for.

The fair deal scheme supports people to access nursing home care. The more people have, the more they pay in terms of income levels. It is structured that way. The less they have, the less they pay. Again, there are huge costs involved here. There are about 24,000 people on that scheme, with 80% supported in private nursing homes and the remainder in HSE-run facilities. The cost has gone from €968 million to €1.2 billion in 2025. That will continue to rise. I take the Deputy's point about the need to try to improve that to give people access closer to home. That is accepted. People generally want to stay at home for as long as they possibly can. There comes a stage, I accept, when a nursing home is required. Obviously, the closer to the family home for the family the better in those situations.

Ceisteanna ar Pholasáí nó ar Reachtaíocht – Questions on Policy or Legislation

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The name of Harvey Morrison Sherratt, a child catastrophically failed by Children's Health Ireland, CHI, was very sadly joined by another name last weekend. That name is Chloe Maher, from Coolock, a 23-year-old who died on 4 March last. Her death was caused by health complications from her untreated scoliosis. Chloe never got the treatment she required when she was in the care of CHI and then she aged out. Chloe was just 14 when Simon Harris promised that no child would wait longer than four months for spinal surgery, but while she waited and waited, Chloe's condition worsened and like too many other young people, and in the words of her heartbroken aunt Orla, they are left until it is too late to operate and then they vanish from the system because they age out. Will there be an investigation-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I call on the Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----into how Chloe was failed as a child and a young adult?

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Will the Taoiseach ensure-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, your time is up, and if you cannot ask a question in the time allowed, you are in the wrong forum.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----that the cases of children who age out of CHI are included in the public inquiry?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call on the Taoiseach to respond.

The Taoiseach: My sympathies go to the family of Chloe Maher, who died recently. She was formerly, as the Deputy said, a patient at CHI's spinal services. I offer my deepest condolences to Chloe's family and friends at what is a very sad time for them.

As the Deputy knows, the Minister has announced that Mr. Remy Farrell has been appointed as the facilitator for the scoping exercise in terms of an inquiry into the spinal services at CHI and paediatric services more generally. Mr. Farrell will engage with patients, families and advocates to assess and consider what steps and what actions may be appropriate in terms of the inquiry and the format of an inquiry.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Taoiseach. These questions are one minute each. I call Deputy Bacik.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Yesterday Conor Gallagher in *The Irish Times*, working with the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, revealed shocking details about the supply chain linked to the Aughinish Alumina plant in Limerick.

His report outlined how significant quantities of alumina from this facility are being exported to Russia, where they are being used to make aluminium, which is then sold to a trading

company supplying over 100 Russian weapons manufacturers. It is deeply alarming to see that shipments of Irish alumina to Russia have increased significantly since Putin's brutal full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It is horrific to see this. It is unconscionable that a plant operating in Ireland could be contributing to materials used in the destruction of so many communities and so much civilian infrastructure in Ukraine and can be used to kill children in Ukraine. This is appalling to see and I do welcome the Taoiseach's commitment to review this report, but the question is clear: what urgent action will the Taoiseach take to ensure that no Irish-based industry or business is complicit in supporting Russia's war machine?

The Taoiseach: Ireland has been very strongly adherent to the EU sanctions framework and principles. The Aughinish plant is not subject to EU sanctions, and there is no proposal at EU level to sanction it. Alumina is not a sanctioned commodity and so under the current framework that is the position. There were reasons for that in terms of the complex supply chains in the modern era where different industries in different countries are interdependent. Some member states depend on the output of the production in Aughinish for their industries. Of course, as I said yesterday, I view with great concern the report in *The Irish Times* and the assertion that the Aughinish product went, via intermediaries, to Russia, to help in many ways to facilitate Russia's war machine. That is a matter of great concern and I will ask the Minister for enterprise to examine the matter and get back to the Deputy on it.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Come back to me on it.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: Over the weekend, violent Israeli settlers rampaged through the West Bank. They blazed a trail of devastation, burning down homes and public buildings and injuring dozens of Palestinians. In a separate attack last week, masked settlers sexually assaulted a Palestinian man in front of his family. They beat him with clubs, tied him up, stripped him naked and zip-tied his genitals. That attack was so horrific that it finally hit the international press but only because two human rights activists, an American and a Portuguese, were present to corroborate it. Palestinians in the West Bank are being terrorised every day by racist, violent Israel settlers and we rarely hear anything about it. In February alone, there were 511 attacks by settlers, who murdered five Palestinians. Now we see Israel invading and occupying southern Lebanon. The IDF is killing with impunity there, bombing civilian infrastructure, and forcing the displacement of 1 million people. My question is: how can the Taoiseach watch what is happening, not just in recent weeks, but for years, and continue to do nothing? When is the occupied territories Bill going to emerge from the black hole it has been hidden in? When is this Government going to act and not just think against Israeli violence?

The Taoiseach: It is an outrageous assertion that we have waited and watched for years and done nothing. That is just wrong. The fact of the matter is that Ireland has strongly articulated on the West Bank issue for many years. We have taken a range of measures with the other EU member states in terms of sanctions against violent Israeli settlers in the West Bank. We have deplored and condemned the behaviour of Israeli settlers in the West Bank. We have taken legal action in international courts. I do not know why the Deputy says things like that just to attack the Government. She seems to be more interested in attacking the Government than Israel. I can never get my head around that sort of orientation and that view. What is happening

in the West Bank is horrific. The Deputy does not have a monopoly on horror and condemnation of what is happening in the West Bank. She just keeps doing it.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I just want an answer. I do not claim to have a monopoly.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: I joined my Green Party colleague Niall Murphy in Galway last weekend, and buses were a central concern of the people we met. The NTA has announced that it expects 60 double-decker, electric buses to be used in Galway by the end of 2027, which is about a year away now. That represents an increase of capacity on individual buses. The important question is: are these going to be new buses, or are they simply going to replace decommissioned buses? Are we going to see more buses on the roads? Will commuters see an improved and more regular timetable? I cite one route, the 424 Galway-Lettermullan service as a clear example of a route that requires extra services but as the Taoiseach knows, there are many more. Will he speak to the improvement of the services in Galway? In particular in the year before those new buses arrive, will commuters in Galway see any improved capacity?

The Taoiseach: We are constantly investing in public transport and public buses as well. I do not have the specifics of the breakdown between replacement and additional buses arising from the very significant investment in 60 double-decker buses. I will revert to the Minister of State with responsibility for transport who is here and who is from Galway as well. I will get the full details and background on the breakdown of those 60 buses. We need to continue to invest more in public transport. This will be additional and also important in terms of emissions reductions and so on it will be impactful.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: I was contacted directly by families affected by this issue who felt that they had no other avenue to go to have their concerns heard. Will the Taoiseach address the situation in Carrigaline Community Special School, which closed its doors for six days following an incident involving one child and reopened, excluding a different child and a parent who were not involved in the event that caused the closure without lawful basis or a breach of procedures? Does he accept that families are being pushed towards reduced school hours and that Cork Education and Training Board, ETB, has stated that it cannot meet its needs when it comes to some of the children enrolled in its care, despite its statutory obligations? In those circumstances, does he consider that Cork ETB is fit for purpose as patron of that particular school and does he stand over the actions of the school? Will he commit to an urgent independent intervention, including full-time orthopaedic supports, and outline the immediate steps that are being taken to restore proper provisions to ensure that no child is denied their appropriate education?

The Taoiseach: I do have confidence in Cork ETB in respect of special education. A number of years ago, it stepped into the breach to establish the school to provide desperately needed places in an area where children could not get places at the time. We had to take action. For the long term ETBs have a very significant role in special education across the country. That is my view. If we look at how it is evolving, some of the section 39 bodies have pulled back from education so the State has to get more involved in this particular area. The structures of ETBs are such that they have flexibility in providing resources.

On the specific case in Carrigaline, I have been in touch with the ETB and I am fully aware of the difficulties and challenges that have occurred there. We are working with the ETB to provide additional resources to enable that school to operate as optimally and effectively as it can for the benefit of the young people who attend it.

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil: Scoil na Maighdine Mhuire in Broadford, County Kildare, an exceptional national school with 60 pupils, is typical of a lot of rural national schools around the country that have a reduction in school numbers and therefore a reduction in capitation. This is posing a challenge for many rural schools. The Financial Support Services Unit has engaged with the school and has essentially used it as a best-case example of a national school doing the most it can with the capitation it has. However, there is a clear issue with capitation funding for rural schools with declining school numbers. I ask that the Department of Education and Youth review the capitation funding for small rural schools to ensure their longevity and that they do not have to continue fundraising year in and year out for vital services such as electricity. It is important to state that this is an exceptional school, with exceptional teachers and exceptional students.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. He is saying it is an illustrative example of the challenges when numbers are reducing and then the impact on capitation. We did increase capitation by a record amount of €20 in the latest budget, which is unprecedented in terms of the scale of the increase. The Deputy has raised a very interesting point that I will bring to the attention of the Minister in terms of the next budget. He is essentially proposing a tiered structure that would take into account the impact of declining numbers in rural schools. That is certainly food for thought and I will talk to the Minister in respect of it.

Deputy Emer Currie: I want to raise the issue of driving test waiting times. Nationally, the average waiting time is back up to 12 weeks. Last year, the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, who is present, instructed the RSA to bring the average times down to ten weeks.

1 o'clock

We need to bring them down and we need to keep them down. The policy should be to stabilise and sustain them at ten weeks. The centre with the second highest waiting time in the country is that at Mulhuddart. This waiting time has consistently been one of the highest and now stands at 20 weeks. That is double the national average. Our waiting times have stayed consistently high since the autumn. A woman who contacted my office this morning said that it took her eight months to get her first driving test. She now has to repeat the test and that will take an additional six months because the lists have now been put together and there is no longer a shorter waiting time for repeat tests. I am looking for an updated plan that targets measures such as longer opening hours and more testers at the centres that need increased capacity.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Seán Canney): I thank the Deputy very much. The waiting time has reduced from an average of 27 weeks. It is down to 12 weeks this year. The problem in Mulhuddart is that we are waiting to open a new centre in Sandyford, which will take some of the pressure off. The number of driving testers has increased. We are at 196 right now. We need to get to 200. There has been an increase in the

number of tests as a result of a regulation I introduced to stop people applying for tests and not showing up. People now have to sit the test. That has added a little bit of pressure to the system. That is being dealt with. Last year, we had 8,000 no-shows because people were just applying for tests so they could renew their learner permit. That provision is gone from next October. There is a bit of pressure there. I got the figures only yesterday. I am talking to the RSA and meeting with its board in the coming weeks to discuss all of that.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: At a recent meeting, members of Louth County Council heard of an expected rise of 25% in the cost of tar, which is obviously a key material for road surfacing. This will obviously lead to huge issues for the roadworks programme. We also hear of the possible impacts of additional costs relating to retrofitting and upgrades, which are absolutely necessary. What engagement has there been? Louth County Council has applied for extra funding to address the impact of recent flooding. It is looking for somewhere around €1.5 million, although that figure probably will not cut the mustard at this point in time. Donald Trump and genocidal Israel's illegal war are causing huge issues. Supports will be needed. I would like to think there is good engagement with local authorities.

The Taoiseach: The implications of this war are widespread. The danger is that there will potentially be secondary effects on the wider economy. Governments cannot chase inflation. We cannot compensate for every price increase everywhere. That will not work. We have to try to target our resources as best we can at those most in need. There are concerns about the inflationary impacts of this crisis, which may feed into the wider economy. It could affect all areas and sectors of the economy. The ECB has already downgraded its economic growth forecasts for the European Union. It was predicting growth of 1.4% for 2026 but it has now reduced that to 0.9%. We will also have to look at our growth figures. I would say there will be some decline in what is expected and anticipated as a result of this crisis.

Deputy Edward Timmins: I will raise the issue of flood damage to roads in County Wicklow caused by Storm Chandra. The recent floods caused severe damage to many rural roads. The council has costed the repairs needed at several million euro. Wicklow County Council has submitted a detailed report to the Department seeking emergency funding assistance to facilitate the timely delivery of the required remedial works and to ensure continued safety and serviceability of the county's road network. I have seen the extent of the damage. It is truly shocking. The roads budget does not cover one-off events like this so I ask that special consideration be given to supporting these repairs. This would represent a much-needed investment in the roads and would actually save money in the long term.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. Bohernabreena Road opened yesterday, which was some help. We welcome that. The flooding as a result of Storm Chandra was quite shocking. As the Deputy will know, it has had a significant impact. The Minister sought submissions from all county councils in respect of the damage done to the roads. We announced various investments in February. Some €718 million for regional and local roads was announced. The Department is liaising with the affected counties, including Wicklow, which was significantly impacted. Approximately 300 local roads were damaged with over 50 left impassable across eight counties. Working with the local authorities, we will see what we can do to respond. Local authorities are advised to set aside a minimum of 10% of the grant

given to them as a contingency to deal with severe weather events and damage to the network. We will follow up on that.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: The recent drowning of Joachim McNulty from Belderrig in County Mayo when his vehicle slipped off a pier is a stark reminder of the urgent need to prioritise pier maintenance around the country. This happened on the anniversary of a similar drowning off a pier in County Donegal. I extend my thoughts and sympathies to Joachim's family. Along with Darren Forde, they are now starting a campaign for the maintenance and proper improvement of piers because dangerous moss-covered pathways and piers and inadequate protections pose real and preventable dangers to the public. They need Government support. Will the Taoiseach commit to funding local authorities properly to carry out this work, to launching a nationwide pier maintenance programme and to introducing a public awareness campaign on the risks of slipways and piers?

The Taoiseach: My sympathies go out to Joachim's family. It is quite a shocking event and very distressing and traumatic for the family. There has been extensive investment in piers over the last number of years. A significant amount of Brexit adjustment reserve funding was allocated to piers. I am of the view that we should continue to invest in piers the length and breadth of the country. We are an island nation and safety is paramount. Local authorities have obligations in this regard as well, as do some port authorities. The consistent annual provision of funding is key in getting to grips with the numerous inlets and piers, including smaller piers, around the country.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The Taoiseach will recall that last November I brought the Wind Turbine Regulation Bill 2025 before the Dáil, partly to get the Bill through and partly in an effort to move the Government on this issue. I have been receiving replies to parliamentary questions on this matter for a decade and a half now. The most recent one, from the start of this month, says:

My Department is currently undertaking a focused review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines ... The review is addressing a number of key aspects of the Guidelines ... [Blah, blah, blah.] That is the same reply I have been getting for a decade and a half. When I introduced that Bill, the Government said it would bring forward guidelines within three months. The Taoiseach, the Government and I all know that, given the subject of debates in the House this week, we need to increase our supply of renewable energy and to become more energy self-sufficient. We cannot depend on Trump and the boys. Nearly a decade and a half has passed. There have been four governments. Who is blocking it? We need to sort it out. It cannot take 15 years to get guidelines in place. I think the Taoiseach would agree with that.

The Taoiseach: It is a tribute to the Deputy's longevity in the House-----

Deputy Brian Stanley: I have grey hairs from it.

The Taoiseach: -----that he has been getting a consistent reply from the Department for a decade and half. I understand the issue but let us be honest: when these guidelines emerge, they will probably lead to a reduction in the number of wind farms. We cannot dress it up and

say that the guidelines will help to expand the supply of onshore wind energy because all of the impetus from Deputies and others has been aimed at restricting the growth of onshore wind farms.

Let us be honest: we have had incredible expansion. That is why I think offshore is where we need to go now for the next decade. That said, onshore wind farms have made an enormous contribution to electricity generation. We kind of shield ourselves from the hard choices as a society. I said yesterday that I was in this House when people were against onshore wind, gas generation and solar. We have a huge challenge in terms of energy independence, and we probably need a greater discussion on that.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I have had a couple of adversarial exchanges with the Taoiseach in this House, but I will be the first person to applaud him if he intervenes in the situation facing healthcare workers with long Covid. He met a group of these workers last June. He knows that their case is genuine and that they have suffered terribly not just with their symptoms but also with being on a financial cliff edge every six or 12 months as their special Covid leave with pay was due to end. Their circumstances are extremely difficult. They are about to transition onto half of their basic salary on the standard sick leave scheme, and they are facing not being able to pay their mortgages soon. Providing these workers, who sacrificed so much on all of our behalf, with financial security would be a minimal cost to the State but would make a profound difference to their lives and to their peace of mind. The group that met the Taoiseach last June urgently needs to meet him again. I know the Taoiseach has been extremely busy recently, but I implore him to make time for that soon.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. It is a very difficult and challenging issue, primarily for those who got long Covid, and they did incredible work in the healthcare service during Covid-19. I met them last June and that resulted in the extension to last December. As the Deputy knows, there was then the Labour Court recommendation. It recommended a final extension and that got expanded. They are now in the public service sick leave scheme and the Deputy has indicated that the full payment will come to an end. I will talk to my colleagues again to see what can be done in endeavouring to support them given the circumstances around their particular case. I will come back to the Deputy on it.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: I want to raise an issue in Mallow General Hospital, which is in my home town. Over the past six months, the day ward has been closed on several occasions to facilitate overcrowding in Cork University Hospital, the Mercy Hospital and Kerry University Hospital. It is entirely unacceptable that day procedures would be halted for several days to facilitate overcrowding. People in genuine need of these day ward procedures have often been told on the morning of their procedure that it has been cancelled. This issue has been highlighted to me by members of staff in Mallow General Hospital and by patients. I am not placing blame here, and I commend the Government and previous Governments on the significant investment in Mallow General Hospital. We are very proud of our hospital. Will the Taoiseach provide a specific date for the opening of the 24 inpatient beds? I want an actual date, and no more "quarter 1" or "quarter 2" predictions. On 3 December 2025, I was told that it would be the end of quarter 1 2026. We are very much near the end of that now. These beds

will help with overcrowding in our larger hospitals. They will keep day ward services constant and continue to upgrade the services in Mallow General Hospital.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Stanley spoke about waiting for a decade and a half. I have waited about three and a half decades for a Member from the Opposition to compliment the Government on its investment in Mallow hospital, so I will take it.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: The previous Deputy, Seán Sherlock, would have as well.

The Taoiseach: It is a very significant moment. People have used that for their campaigns for about 50 years. To get praise for the investment in the hospital is a major watershed moment politically. I jest, but Deputy Kenny makes a very serious point. Mallow General Hospital, Bantry General Hospital, Cork University Hospital, Mercy University Hospital and South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital all have to be used now as part of integrated care model. Cork University Hospital covers the entire region. If there are huge pressures on its emergency services, it makes sense to use Mallow hospital every now and again if there are spare beds to alleviate the pressure at Cork University Hospital. I take the Deputy's point, however. Optimally, we want the day procedures operating all of the time, 24-7, if possible, for throughput, and also getting that further project completed.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: Will the Taoiseach provide a date on the opening?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach will have to come back to the Deputy in writing.

The Taoiseach: I will come back to the Deputy with a date.

Deputy Brian Brennan: I seek an update on the applications from Wexford County Council and Wicklow County Council for emergency funding for urgent road repairs following Storm Chandra. I strongly commend both councils' teams on their work to date. I welcome the Taoiseach's visit to many of the affected areas in days following the storm. However, this week, almost two months on from the storm, many roads remain closed or simply impassable. There are damaged or collapsed roads the length and breadth of Wicklow and Wexford from Kilanerin to Enniskerry, and from Coolkenno down to Kilmore Quay. Many of the potholes are now mini craters. When we factor in the combination of darkness and rain, these roads are a serious risk to commuters. We do not need a quick-fix solution. The roads need to be completely resurfaced and drainage must be addressed, or we will be back here again in 12 months. The CEO of Wexford County Council, Eddie Taaffe, and the CEO of Wicklow County Council, Emer O'Gorman, have submissions on the desk of the Minister, Deputy O'Brien. Two months on, we simply need to sign off on this long-overdue critical funding.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport Deputy Seán Canney: The Department of Transport has been liaising with all of the local authorities on foot of the flooding that happened. They have done a schedule and survey of all of the roads that have to be done. Preliminary costings have been prepared. Our Department is working with each local authority to put in place a plan for executing these works. As the Taoiseach said earlier, some

discretionary money has been allocated to local authorities. Of course they will need support in carrying out these works. Our Department is working closely with each local authority so we can put in place a programme to get the works done as quickly as possible.

Deputy Michael Cahill: I again raise the CAMHS scandal in Kerry. Will the Minister of State, Deputy Butler, provide updates on the north Kerry look-back review and the compensation scheme? I thank the Minister of State for visiting Kerry recently and meeting with individuals and their families. She has always made herself available to the families. I was in Leinster House on a number of occasions over the years when the Minister of State met with them and listened to their concerns. I want to ensure that all of these children, many of whom are young adults today, are adequately compensated and that all services are regularly available to them. These individuals and their families suffered greatly. They were misdiagnosed and mismedicated. I want to ensure that everything possible is done to make their lives some bit easier.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): I thank the Deputy for raising this really important issue. I compliment him on his advocacy for the families and the children over many years. As he knows, a report relating to another group of children who unfortunately were harmed by the mental health services in Kerry was published recently. I visited and met with some of the families. At that time, I said that I would be coming forward very soon with a new compensation scheme. I will be able to announce the details of that tomorrow. Again, it will be a non-adversarial scheme. The Taoiseach was very conscious that we had to continue the same approach that has worked really well for 230 of the previous 240 children who have availed of the scheme. I will also announce details of the further look-back report. Over the recess at Easter, I will visit Kerry and meet some of the families that the Deputy asked me to meet and that I was not able to meet the last day I was there.

Deputy Claire Kerrane: Of the 1,800 children in Roscommon and Galway waiting to see a psychologist, over 1,000 have waited for one year. A business case is being submitted for a dedicated CAMHS team in Ballinasloe this year. The CAMHS service that was there previously was closed, and parents have to trek an 80 km to 90 km round trip to Roscommon for appointments. When this business case is submitted, will the Minister of State reinstate the dedicated CAMHS team for Ballinasloe as quickly as possible?

Deputy Mary Butler: I thank the Deputy for raising this really important issue. Primary care psychology and the CAMHS teams are two separate services, as the Deputy knows and understands. The majority of the children on the waiting list are for the primary care psychology team. They are not for the CAMHS team. We are trying to reduce the number of children waiting for CAMHS. I visited over 21 teams in the past six months to see what we could do to support the teams on the ground. There are a lot of culture issues and different challenges across different teams. No two teams are the same. In relation to the Deputy's question, there will be a waiting list initiative this year for primary care psychology to try to remove as many children as possible from that list. Believe it or not, it does not technically come under the mental health budget. I am putting a complete focus on it because it has a knock-on effect on the CAMHS teams.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: We have had a discussion about the immediate measures needed to help with the fuel crisis. We have also talked about the longer term investment in the grid network. I am talking about a couple of quick wins. Yesterday the issue of plug-in solar, which would put it into the household, was referenced. I would like to add to that by talking about the solar panels that you can put on your balcony and use to charge your devices. There should be some sort of a discount on them, or some sort of a grant should be available, so people can save those little costs that add up over a period.

Second, in relation to EVs, at the moment a lot of newer estates do not have their own driveways. They are trying to put a cable underground. I have raised this before. It is massively more expensive to charge using these on-street chargers rather than using the domestic tariff. Could that be looked at in this context?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for his constructive, low-hanging fruit-type ideas. I will talk to the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, in respect of those issues and how we can incentivise or trigger a greater uptake and utilisation of them.

On the EV question, something has to be done there.

An Bille um an Aonú Leasú is Daichead ar an mBunreacht (Ceart chun Títhíochta), 2026: An Chéad Chéim

Forty-first Amendment of the Constitution (Right to Housing) Bill 2026: First Stage

Deputy Rory Hearne: Tairgim: “Go gceadófar go dtabharfar isteach Bille dá ngairtear Acht chun an Bunreacht a leasú.”

I move: “That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Constitution.”

This is my first Bill to be brought forward in Dáil Éireann. The Forty-first Amendment of the Constitution (Right to Housing) Bill 2026 seeks to put a right to housing into Bunreacht na hÉireann. The housing crisis is the most serious issue facing our country. It is an emergency and a social catastrophe. The most shameful thing is that it is the Government's policies that have created this crisis. I refer, for example, to the way it has turned housing into an investment asset and failed over and over to treat it as a human right. Housing is a human right. Is ceart daonna í an tithíocht. A home is a fundamental need and a fundamental right, yet not once in policy, in our laws or in our Constitution is housing described or treated as a human right. The fundamental change in housing that is so urgently needed will be achieved when we fundamentally change how the Government and the State treat and deliver housing. It needs to be delivered and treated as a human right.

Is é seo mo chéad Bhille i nDáil Éireann. Is í aidhm an Bhille um an Aonú Leasú is Daichead ar an mBunreacht (Ceart chun Tithíochta), 2026 ná cearta tithíochta a chur i mBunreacht na hÉireann. Is í seo an cheist is tromchúisí inár dtír. Is éigeandáil agus tubaiste sóisialta é. Is riachtanas bunúsach é teach, agus is ceart bunúsach daonna é, ach fós ní chuirtear síos air ná ní dhéantar é a chóireáil mar cheart daonna uair amháin inár mbeartais, inár ndlíthe ná inár mBunreacht. Bainfear amach an t-athrú bunúsach i dtithíocht nuair a athróimid go bunúsach

an chaoi a gcaitheann an Rialtas agus an Stát le tithíocht agus í a sheachadadh; is é sin í a chóireáil go cinnte agus í sheachadadh mar cheart daonna.

Hundreds of thousands of people in Ireland lack a secure, affordable home. A safe, secure home at a decent standard is central to our very existence, our physical health and our psychological well-being. It is necessary to facilitate child development and full citizen participation in society and the economy. A home is central to the dignity of each and every person and is the foundation of every person's life. It provides the secure base from which to carry out all of life's functions.

The impact of housing is most clearly visible in the devastating physical and mental health impacts of homelessness on children in particular. Hundreds of thousands of people in Ireland do not have access to the right to housing and do not have access to adequate housing. I refer to renters living in insecure housing who are paying rents that leave them in poverty, to younger generations living in overcrowded accommodation who are unable to leave the family home because of a lack of affordable housing, and to those who are homeless. Homelessness is described by the United Nations as "the most egregious violation of the right to housing", yet homelessness in Ireland has become normalised. It has become an entrenched social problem whereby children are left homeless for years in emergency accommodation. Over 2,500 children have spent more than one year in emergency accommodation.

Many European countries, such as Finland, Belgium, Portugal and Sweden, include the right to housing in their constitutions. The Constitution is the ultimate repository of our national values. Indeed, there is no legal right to housing in Irish law, in our legislation or currently in the Constitution. The Housing Commission was given the job by the previous Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael Government to develop recommendations in relation to a referendum on the right to housing. It brought forward a proposal two years ago and recommended in its report that a right to housing should be inserted in our Constitution. What I have done with this Bill is bring forward its recommendation to amend Article 40 to insert in the Constitution a very clear right to housing. The new Article 40A of our Constitution would provide that the State recognises that having a home is of fundamental importance to quality of life and that access to adequate housing by facilitating the development of family, social and community relationships promotes the common good. The second part of the proposed new article provides that "the State therefore guarantees to every Citizen a right of access to adequate housing and pledges, as far as practicable, by its laws, to protect and vindicate that right." Inserting that right into our Constitution would provide a clear obligation on the State to deliver housing.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill being opposed?

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Mary Butler): Déanaim comhghairdeas leis an Teachta Hearne as a chéad Bhille. The Bill is not opposed.

Cuireadh agus aontaíodh an cheist.

Question put and agreed to.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to move that Second Stage be taken in Private Members' time.

Deputy Rory Hearne: Tairgim: "Go dtógfar an Bille in am Comhaltaí Príobháideacha."

I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Cuireadh agus aontaíodh an cheist.

Question put and agreed to.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 1.27 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 2.27 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 1.27 p.m. and resumed at 2.27 p.m.

National Oil Reserves Agency (Amendment) Bill 2026: Second Stage

Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I welcome the opportunity to bring this Bill forward today. I thank my officials for the work they have done in a very short space of time as well as the Whip's office and the Opposition for facilitating this just the day after it was approved by the Government. I am acutely aware of the pressures being faced by Irish businesses and households.

This Bill is being progressed as a critical response to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, where the sharp and ongoing disruption to oil and gas production has resulted in higher global energy prices. Around the world, including here in Ireland, we have seen customers face higher prices for transport and home heating fuel. I know the House will share my concern at the immense human cost of this conflict and my desire to see an immediate de-escalation of the conflict and the resumption of normal activity in the Strait of Hormuz.

The amendments being made via the Bill are part of a targeted package of support by the Government to address the pressure faced by consumers. The Bill gives the necessary legal basis for a reduction in the National Oil Reserves Agency, NORA, levy from 2 cent per litre to a nominal amount, effectively zero, for a two-month period. The reduction will come into effect from 1 April until 1 June 2026. The Government has reduced the rate of mineral oil tax for petrol, diesel and marked gas oil by 15 cent, 20 cent and 3 cent, respectively. These measures were passed by financial resolution last night, with near unanimous support from across the House. I will not labour the point, but I thought it was opposition for opposition's sake when Sinn Féin opposed the reduction in excise duty yesterday evening. I hope the House can work in a constructive way today and be unanimous on this additional support, which is time-bound and targeted.

Supports for haulage and passenger bus operators have also been introduced and the fuel allowance has been extended by four weeks, protecting the most vulnerable in society. About 470,000 homes are now in receipt of the fuel allowance. The changes being made to the fuel allowance will mean those eligible households will receive additional financial support of €152.

Looking at it in the round it is a package of about €235 million in initial supports. We have retained the flexibility to be able to go back at this should we need to. The Bill also provides scope for the Government to amend this period by way of order at a later date, if required.

Currently, the NORA levy is a charge of 2 cent per litre applied to most petroleum products sold in the market for the purpose of funding the operations of the agency and the Climate Action Fund. The reduction in the NORA levy for a two-month period is estimated to result in a reduction of levy income accruing to NORA of approximately €20 million and will remove this cost from consumers. The agency has operational responsibility for the day-to-day management of the State's strategic oil reserve. It currently holds 90 days of oil stocks. Stock may be released from Ireland's stockholding in the event of a shortage of refined product on the domestic market, or as recently happened to participate in an International Energy Agency, IEA, collective action, to alleviate a global oil shortage.

Temporary and targeted measures to reduce fuel prices for households and businesses, with additional supports for key sectors of the economy are being introduced and may be adjusted as the situation evolves.

Since the outbreak of this conflict, the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment has met on a regular basis to assess the implications for the energy sector. Last week, I again chaired a meeting of the national energy affordability taskforce specifically focussed on this ongoing crisis. The group heard from the IEA's chief energy economist, Tim Gould, who provided sobering insight into the scope and impact of this conflict. On the basis of this presentation, it was clear that the conflict has already had a significant impact on the global supply of oil in particular, and that the nature and scale of this impact can increase exponentially as the conflict goes on and if there is additional direct damage to oil and gas facilities. A couple of the facilities that have been damaged and nearly destroyed will take a number of years to be restored into use. Because of the nature of shipping times, we are likely only beginning to see the full impact of the Strait of Hormuz, and while markets have priced this in to some extent, the effect on prices will be more severe if transit through the trait remains restricted.

Our policy response must therefore be responsive to the conflict, and it is clear that there are still myriad scenarios as to how this unfolds. For this reason, I have requested that the national energy affordability taskforce establishes a dedicated expert advisory subgroup to monitor global supply and, in particular, supply to Ireland and to advise on appropriate demand-side responses. This group will be stood up in the coming days and will provide expert insight into me as Minister and to the Government. Supplies in Ireland remain sufficient, but there have been significant price increases arising from the market pressures. While it is clear that Ireland will be affected by this global supply chain, there is an obligation on suppliers to treat Irish consumers with fairness and respect. On this basis, I have written to retail electricity and gas suppliers, as well as the CRU and fuel suppliers, to emphasise the importance of reducing the exposure for Irish consumers from the price shocks that global uncertainty has created. In addition, the taskforce has been established by the Government to identify, assess and implement measures that will enhance energy affordability for households and businesses while delivering key renewables commitments and protecting security of supply and economic stability. The first report of this group was brought forward in advance of budget 2026, and a range of measures were adopted on foot of that work. This included increased rates of payment and widened eligibility for social protection payments, a reduced rate of VAT to 9% on electricity and gas through to 2030, as well as the largest ever retrofitting budget. A key output of the taskforce will be the energy affordability action plan, which will identify a comprehensive range of solutions, including measures targeting households in energy poverty. The plan is currently being developed and will be finalised in advance of budget 2027.

As Minister for Climate, Energy and Environment, this crisis has only strengthened my resolve to drastically improve Ireland's energy resilience by building our domestic renewables. This reduces our dependence as a country on imported fossil fuels, thereby reducing our exposure to the inevitable fluctuations and volatility in the market. To the end of 2024 we saw 40% of our electricity being generated from renewable sources, more than double the amount of renewables that were in our system in 2015 - all while demand for electricity has grown. We are building on that strong base with successful auctions, both onshore and offshore, with simplifying planning processes in order to accelerate the delivery of new projects, and by providing €3.5 billion in equity into the grid. At individual household level, retrofitting is one of the very best measures which a household can take to reduce their energy bills permanently. This year, I secured a record allocation for fully-funded and granted-assisted retrofits of €640 million which allows us to target 73,000 home energy upgrades this year. That will be added to in excess of 240,000 that have already received grants to retrofit their homes to make them warmer, their energy more efficient and to reduce their energy bills permanently. We need to accelerate the deployment of those grants as well as the grants to businesses. Last year alone, we saw 4,000 businesses avail of energy retrofit supports which reduces their energy use and to look to alternative uses of energy too and reduces their energy bills. These are permanent changes. That is why it is so critically important that the carbon tax remains in place. It is that tax that is ring-fenced to carry out the works we need right the way across residential and business sectors to improve people's homes and reduce energy use.

Energy affordability remains an absolute priority for this Government. Times are particularly difficult in what is a global crisis on the energy side, particularly with regard to supply and price increases. These are situations that Ireland is not grappling with on its own. The measures we have brought forward - which are immediate, short-term flexible measures - can be compared with our nearest neighbour which has deployed about £53 million, or €60 million, in its initial response. We have done it in a considered and practical way that can be sustained. We have to ensure that any measures we bring forward are affordable and sustainable but that we also retain the ability to respond further should this crisis accelerate and should the issue of price inflation in relation to fuel and electricity worse. It has the potential to increase more later on this year as many of our energy companies are hedged through this immediate crisis and we may see the pass-on effect of the price increases we are seeing now coming onto our electricity retailers to users in coming months. That is the reason we have to ensure the measures we bring forward are flexible and time-bound and that we retain the opportunity to respond as necessary.

If we look at the number of crises this country has faced in recent times, from Brexit to the illegal invasion of Ukraine, the cost-of-living crisis and Covid, at every stage the Government has brought forward measures that by any fair assessment have worked and protected our economy and society. It is to ensure we can come through this particular crisis in the same manner we have to use appropriate supports that are sustainable and we will retain the right and the ability to be able to respond further should we need to. I commend the Bill to the House.

I thank colleagues for their time today and I look forward to hearing their contributions.

Deputy Pa Daly: Across the State there are families standing in cold kitchens looking at empty oil tanks. Workers are seeing the fuel gauge drop on the school run unsure of how they

are going to pay for the next fill as prices at the pump spin out of control. For four long weeks, ordinary people watched with increasing anxiety while prices skyrocketed with the price of diesel up 55% and home heating oil, which was the source of the largest number of complaints I received in the constituency of Kerry, doubling in costs. One bill I saw went from €473 to over €800 in the matter of a week or so.

Meanwhile, the Government sat and twiddled its thumbs monitoring the situation. In truth, the Government was perfectly content to ride this one out leaving workers and families high and dry. However, relentless pressure and massive public anger forced it to act. The package had to be dragged out of the Government yet the Minister has come to the table with only half measures.

Once again, the Government has failed to back the people. It has failed to provide the maximum support that people needed and demanded. This is a political choice - a choice to abandon millions of workers and families crippled under the weight of this crisis, a choice to offer tokenism when real support was needed and a choice that tells ordinary people exactly whose side this Government is on. It is definitely not theirs.

While people cannot afford to heat their homes, the Government sits on a €12.5 billion surplus. While the cost of fuel has gone through the roof, the Government's tax take rises with it because, as the Minister knows, 60% to 65% of every litre goes straight to the Exchequer. When ordinary families came knocking, the cupboard was bare. However, as we saw in the budget when the bankers and the developers came knocking, there was never a shortage. All of this comes on top of a cost-of-living crisis that was crushing people even before fuel prices spiked. A total of 320,000 people and rising cannot pay their electricity bills. Arrears are growing every month. People are choosing between heating and food. Workers are trapped in cars that they cannot afford to fill because there is no alternative. We see that one third of the grants for electric vehicles are given to cars that are worth €55,000 or more and over half are given to cars that cost €40,000 or more. If someone can afford to buy a car that is worth €55,000, he or she does not need an untargeted measure or if it is targeted, it is targeted at people who can afford it. The answer here was a four-week extension to the fuel allowance, a measure that the Government's figures show cannot keep pace with rising costs. Families needed a government of action, but they got a do-nothing government that hoped the crisis would simply blow over.

The 2 cent cut on home heating oil is particularly insulting. It is a slap in the face to the 750,000 households that have seen their prices more than double in the past few weeks. A lot of them are more rural houses, one-off houses and houses that are owned by people who are older. Of all the Government's half-baked measures in response to the crisis, this is the biggest failure because households are now forced to fork out over €1,700 for a tank of home heating oil and all the Government offers them is a temporary reprieve of €20. If this was not insulting enough, the Government is pulling a fast one and taking the public for fools. The 2 cent reduction will be completely wiped out by yet another hike in the regressive carbon tax. Earlier, the Taoiseach said that he does not know what our policy is on that. He obviously has not been monitoring the news too closely over the past year or so.

The Government is giving with one hand and taking away with the other. Those who rely on home heating oil to keep warm, many of them in my own county, have been completely abandoned. You would think that the people of Kerry could rely on some of the loudest critics

of the carbon tax during the previous Dáil term to have their back but this is not the case. After all, the carbon tax is neither ring-fenced nor is it a behavioural measure, as the Comptroller and Auditor General report stated as did the Economic and Social Research Institute, ESRI. There was a better and fairer way. We gave the solutions. We have been consistently giving them, including remove all excise on home heating oil, which will save €182 on a €1,000 fill, cut petrol and diesel by the maximum permissible amount, extend the fuel allowance by 13 weeks, not the paltry four, scrap the carbon tax increases, and deliver proper, fair, accessible climate action to address our over-reliance on imported fossil fuels and achieve Irish energy independence by seizing on our incredible renewable potential.

A just transition does not equate to regressive taxes that punish people who have no alternative. These are affordable and responsible proposals. It is simply not true to say that our proposals on carbon tax would mean no money for retrofitting. Every year in our alternative budget, Sinn Féin's shows how the Government could invest more in retrofitting without punishing people who have no other choice. Our fairer retrofitting plan also had targeted measures at those who needed it the most, rather than having it be the preserve of those with considerable means. There is no just transition if ordinary people are locked out of it and punished as a result. Sinn Féin showed how there could be meaningful interventions, but the Government chose not to listen.

The Government then told people in the South what it cannot do. It tried to deflect blame onto Sinn Féin in the North where we do not have control of excise duty, do not control taxation and where the Westminster cuts have gutted public services for over a decade. That is absurd. If the Government wants to address a united Ireland in a meaningful way, it could go about it, but it clearly is not. Sinn Féin will continue to demand meaningful action, not tokenism or half measures.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: This Government led by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael has abandoned hundreds of thousands of households who rely on home heating oil in the middle of an energy crisis. It has turned its back on the very people who are being hit hardest - families who have seen the cost of heating almost double in a matter of weeks. The Minister should make no mistake about it, there is real anger out there. People who are already stretched to the limit simply do not know how they will afford their next fill of oil. The Government's message to them, whether it admits it or not, is that they are on their own.

Let us strip it back. A 2 cent cut in the middle of an emergency is not help. It is not relief. It is an insult. To add insult to injury, in a matter of weeks the Government will claw it back through another carbon tax hike. It gives with one hand and takes with the other. Let us think about how that looks for families out there sitting in cold homes tonight. At a time other countries are scrambling to bring down energy prices, the Government is preparing to increase taxes on home heating oil, gas and even on a bag of coal. It is staggering and it is completely out of touch. Last night was a cold night. It was cold in homes right across the State. What people were waiting for was Government action. What they got was a Government that abandoned them. It voted down proposals we tabled to remove excise duty completely from home heating oil and to cut the excise on diesel by the maximum amount with the same for petrol. As the Government did that, a grandmother reached out to me devastated. She said:

Pearse, I'm a granny with a disabled son at home. I have taken on an extra job onto my full-time job just to support myself and my son. Even with the second job, I'm emailing you tonight with a blanket wrapped round me because I have no heating oil. I don't care about me. It's my son whom it is affecting more due to me only being at home one day a week. On that day, I have to do my shopping, clean my house, do the laundry, as I have no other time to do it. I'm sore. I'm exhausted. I have no quality of life.

That is what the Government's decisions mean in real life. That is the human costs of its inaction. She is not alone. There are hundreds of thousands of families just like hers doing the right thing, working hard, cutting back and still being pushed to the brink. What people need is real action, and I am going to continue to fight for them. I am going to continue to have their backs. They cannot put up with more delays from this Government because people need a complete removal of excise duty from home heating oil, the maximum cuts in diesel and the same for petrol. They need the Government to abandon its mad idea and reckless plan to jack up prices by increasing carbon taxes in the middle of this crisis.

Here is the truth. There is nothing stopping the Government from doing it - nothing at all. Right now, families are sitting in cold homes under real pressure and being left behind. That is on the Minister.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: The 2 cent cut on home heating oil is an absolute slap in the face for people as it is. The fact that the Government is going to take it back off them in a couple of weeks makes it worse. It is going to give a very meagre amount with one hand and it will take it back in a couple of weeks knowing, as it does, that going into this latest crisis that 320,000 people are in arrears on their electricity bills, knowing that people are already under a severe amount of pressure and knowing that we are in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, whether the Government acknowledges it or not. That cost-of-living crisis is very real. The Government's energy affordability taskforce has advised that the cost of fuel would increase by €321. This does not even touch sides of that. Do not take our word for it; the Minister can take the word of his own taskforce. It is telling him what is needed. We have told him what is needed. We have brought forward solutions. We have brought forward a plan that would make a real and meaningful difference in the lives of people who are worried that they will be cold in their homes.

That should be a wake-up call for any Government but even the worst Government - the most out-of touch, tone-deaf Government - would not make things worse. It would not charge people even more in a couple of weeks' time. It would not jack up the costs even further but that is what the Government is proposing to do. The Minister's speech stated that any fair assessment of the Government's plan would see that it is the right thing to do but he should not take my assessment for this. I am going to read out a message I got from a woman who I will call Mary. She said:

In brief I'm a full time carer to my son who has very complex needs. My husband works full time, we have a mortgage and we need two cars. My son needs an electric bed, an air mattress, a feed pump, a suction machine, eight nebulisers on two different machines, a ceiling track hoist, a power chair and obviously needs the heating on all night.

She said, "... it is disgraceful for the Government to act like we are being looked after. I just felt I needed to express our disappointment at the announcement of this emergency package and I'm hoping that you can bring it up." Well I will bring up it but what is the Minister's answer to her assessment of his plan?

Deputy Matt Carthy: Let us call out what happened this week. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael TDs voted against Sinn Féin proposals that would have substantially cut the cost of petrol, diesel and home heating oil. Instead they brought in measures that fall far short. Now we are arriving with a 2 cent cut in the NORA levy and the Government expects applause. That is not leadership. It is actually damage control. It is far too little far too late. The reality is simple though. In a few weeks, today's tiny reduction is going to be wiped out by another carbon tax increase. It is classic Simon Harris - give with one hand today and take back with the other tomorrow - but people see through it, especially in rural communities, people in communities who have no choice but to use their cars and families who are depending on home heating oil just to keep their home warm. For these people, what the Government has announced is not relief; it is downright insulting. It is the same for farmers who are already under huge pressure facing soaring costs for green diesel and fertiliser. The Government's response does not even come close to recognising the scale of the challenge they face. What is most telling in all of this is that even as the limited measures are being introduced, we have Ministers already talking about how they are going to take them away and when. That tells us everything we need to know. The Government is out of touch with the real pressures people face every day. That has long been evident but I want to make it absolutely clear that the battle is not over. Sinn Féin forced the Government to introduce the bits it introduced this week but alongside workers, families, businesses, carers and farmers, we are going keep pushing for fairness. We are going to force the Minister to deliver the type of support the families we represent desperately need.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: Two cent per litre is €20 for a 1,000 litre fill when people are afraid to turn on their heating - this Government will be remembered as the Government of fuel poverty and energy poverty. It is pushing people into energy poverty. To add fuel to the fire, it is incredible that the Government still plans to proceed with the next carbon tax hike in May. At a time when people are already stretched to breaking point, this decision defies all logic.

This measure is an insult to the people of Mayo who make up some of the 750,000 households that are reliant on home heating oil to keep warm or to have some hot water. We talk about rationing and the possibility of rationing into the future if we have shortages of oil but I can tell the Minister one thing. There are many households across this country tonight who are self-rationing - doing without heat or hot water because they cannot afford it. It is no surprise once again that it is rural households like my own in Mayo that are being left behind.

What does the Government think it is like for the people living in the houses affected by defective concrete blocks when they see the houses crumbling around them? There are cracks in the wall and they are trying to heat them. The Minister was the previous housing Minister and now he is the Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment. Can he imagine how cold it is? I got calls from Mayo this morning to say how freezing cold it was.

The Government could have adopted Sinn Féin's legislation to completely remove excise on home heating oil, which would have provided meaningful and immediate relief. Let us be honest about the Government's measure to extend the fuel allowance for four weeks. It cannot

even be dignified by being described as a half measure. It is completely tokenistic. It is too little and it is too late. People need decisive action now. They need somebody to have their back and I am telling them here today that Sinn Féin and I will certainly have the back of the people in Mayo because they deserve it.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Today, 500 litres of home heating oil in Cork cost €900. That is less than half a tank. What the Government has proposed is a €10 cut. How insulting is that? The Minister is an intelligent man. Does he not think that this is insulting to people who are struggling to keep the heating on? Does he accept this is not good enough? If he does not accept it, I cannot believe him. The way the Minister is treating people with home heating oil is horrendous. There are people, especially older people, who are afraid to turn on the heating because they do not know how they are going to pay their bills.

The Minister came in here earlier and said the Government is going to write to the energy companies. Forget about writing to them; drag them in here and tell them no more price gouging because price gouging is the same as robbing ordinary workers and people. The minute the war started, they put up the prices even though the price of oil and diesel had not gone up. What is the Minister doing? People are struggling and the Government is giving people crumbs off the table. The Minister needs to get energy companies in here. We have the highest electricity bills in Europe and over 300,000 people in arrears. Does the Minister know what is going to happen on the back of his announcement? More families are going to go into arrears on their electricity and gas bills and people are going to be cold because they will not have money to fill their tanks with home heating oil. People are struggling. A young girl who is going to college said to me yesterday that she is going walk to college because she will not have the money to put diesel in her car. She is going to college and working part time. There are pensioners who are putting extra cardigans on and people who are walking because this Government failed to deliver.

Deputy Réada Cronin: It took four weeks into this global crisis created by a warmonger in Israel and his boor in the US for this Government to take some action. The reduction in excise duty was a welcome step but it did not go far enough. People will still be paying more for petrol and diesel than they did before the start of this war. On top of that, the carbon tax increase is going to offset every measure the Government is bringing forward. We already know that carbon tax cannot change behaviour unless there is an alternative. The Comptroller and Auditor General reported to the Committee of Public Accounts a few months ago that only 61% of what the Government has ring-fenced has actually been used to help people out. The Government has been found out trying to con the people with more than 320,000 families already in energy arrears.

This legislation looks to protect more than 750,000 households that rely on home heating oil by reducing the price by a whopping 2 cent per litre. That is a reduction of about €20 on fuel that now costs almost €2,000. The Minister is taking the mick. Thousands of people in my constituency in north Kildare rely on home heating oil to heat their homes and have been left high and dry by this do nothing Government. Sinn Féin's legislation would have reduced the cost of a 1,000 litre tank by €183 instead of the measly €20 the Government has proposed here today. These are the protections that people need. Sinn Féin is calling on the Government to scrap the increase in the carbon tax, introduce proper measures that we have handed to it to

protect those using home heating oil and invest out in solar and wind to protect families from future actions by warmongers.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: I begin by cautiously welcoming the short-term reprieve brought about by the Government's decision to reduce excise duty temporarily; to cut the NORA levy, a measure to which this legislation gives effect; and to take on board one of the Labour Party's proposals, which was to extend the fuel allowance by four weeks. The Labour Party voted in support of the introduction of these measures last night and we will support today's legislation as well as it is going some way to ease the financial pressure on working people across the country but, of course, we believe that more can and must be done. We have seen a huge degree of uncertainty and anxiety as fuel prices skyrocketed following Trump and Netanyahu's illegal and bloody misadventure in Iran began, particularly among vulnerable households that rely on liquid fuels to keep their homes warm and those who need to drive to work.

3 o'clock

This crisis has left no one untouched. In every part of the country, ordinary households are feeling the pressure of rising energy costs in an immediate and seemingly relentless way. All of us in this House will have heard from our constituents over the last number of weeks about the effect this is having on them, about how anxiety-inducing a trip to the petrol station has become and about how heating bills feel like a looming threat. For so many households, the cost of getting to work or bringing the kids to school has now become a financial calculation. We are talking about the lived experiences of working people, older people and families who are struggling to hold things together in the midst of what the International Energy Agency has described as the "gravest energy shock of all time", and that is on top of our existing cost-of-living crisis. I sincerely hope that the measures announced yesterday by the Government provide some relief to people who are really feeling the pain in this energy crisis but we should not kid ourselves into thinking that these measures are anything more than sticking plasters. They are short-term and limited and they do not provide anyone with any real certainty. The energy market is so volatile at present - determined, it would seem, by whichever side of the bed Donald Trump wakes up on - that any benefit arising out of the temporary reduction in excise duty and the small cut to the NORA levy could be wiped out by the end of the week or even sooner.

The reality is that the measures the Government has introduced do not go far enough. They will not provide much reassurance to households and commuters, only a temporary reprieve that is vulnerable to further price increases. What happens if this war rages on beyond May and energy costs continue to pile pressure upon consumers? These new measures are not a long-term strategy to protect households and they certainly are not about building a more secure future in our energy systems. They are a short-term instrument that the Government has belatedly brought in to get people off their back. As I have said, we support the individual measures, but the overall package is, in the words of my colleague, Deputy Nash, "timid, anaemic and underwhelming".

The Government could and should have gone further to support households and commuters in the short to medium term. The Labour Party has long championed strengthening our remote and flexible working legislation, and that is now more important than ever in the context of the diesel and petrol price crisis. During recent yellow weather warnings, workers were

encouraged to work from home where possible. The same logic and support must be provided to workers at this critical time. Remote work is no longer only a workers' rights or quality-of-life issue; it is a real and effective way to protect many people from this present energy crisis. The Government must urgently reconsider its position on the Labour Party's Work Life Balance (Right to Remote Work) Bill 2026. It must institute a genuine right to remote and flexible working, not the tepid right-to-request model that we have at present. In effect, that has been a licence for employers to refuse requests. It should be obvious to the Government that by reducing people's need to travel to and from their workplace, it is shielding them from the sky-high prices we are seeing at the garage forecourts. The Minister does not even have to take our word for it. The International Energy Authority has explicitly said that people should be encouraged to work from home so that the cost of commuting is mitigated. This is a no-brainer - something that can bring relief to many workers without a direct cost to the State - and I have not heard any justification for not doing it.

There are other measures that could be taken in the short term to protect people against prices at the pumps. We should be looking at implementing an emergency reduction in public transport fares by at least 10% and identifying all opportunities to increase the capacity and frequency of services. More broadly, this crisis has exposed the fundamental issue in our transport system - our over-reliance on private car use. That is something that we desperately need to change. I acknowledge improvements that were made over the course of the previous Government, particularly with regard to the roll-out of Local Link buses. We need to double-down on that progress. It has been disheartening to see any momentum that had built up during the previous Government in terms of our commitment to public transport expansion being squandered by this Government. The 2:1 spending ratio in favour of public transport and active travel has been done away with. The national development plan, NDP, review's sectoral investment plan for transport was a damp squib that pushed back the start dates of vital transport projects. The reality is that too many people in Ireland remain dependent on their cars because they have no viable alternative. Public transport is simply not good enough in many parts of the country. Services are infrequent, routes are limited and reliability is often lacking.

While we can take short-term measures to try to reduce the cost of public transport and encourage people to leave the car at home to avoid increasing fuel costs, the bigger picture is that we need to reduce the need for expensive car journeys in the first place. That is the longer-term solution to high costs at the pump but it means investing in a public transport system that is affordable, reliable and accessible. It means expanding bus services, increasing rail capacity and ensuring that rural communities are not left behind. It means creating a network that people can depend on in their daily lives. It means going further in terms of our active travel network.

Cycling is the cheapest, healthiest, cleanest and often most efficient way of getting around. The Leas-Cheann Comhairle may have seen a piece by RTÉ yesterday in which they timed three people making a journey from Knocklyon, in my own constituency of Dublin South-West, into town - one driving, one taking a bus and one cycling. Those of us who make that journey into work in the city centre every day will not have been surprised by the finding that cycling is the fastest option. That said, and notwithstanding the significant improvements that have been made in recent years, the cycle network along that route remains a patchwork, for instance where the incredible Dodder greenway ends at the Rathfarnham Road as you head into town and you are abruptly spat back out onto the road alongside cars. As the RTÉ presenter said, it does not pass the test of whether you would allow your child to cycle on that route. It

is a real safety concern, and it is the sort of thing that discourages more people from leaving the car at home and getting them or their families on their bikes. People should not feel like they are taking their life into their hands when they decide to cycle to work.

Returning to my main point, I hope this fuel crisis will serve as further evidence for this Government of the pitfalls of a transport system built primarily around private car use, not only for climate and health reasons, or to deal with the chronic traffic issues and congestion around our cities, but also for how vulnerable it leaves people when petrol and diesel prices shoot up. There will always be a need for private cars, of course, but when people are forced to rely exclusively on cars it leaves them exposed to fuel shocks like the one we are experiencing at present. The solution has to be further and urgent investment in public transport and active travel expansion, improved bus services in our rural communities, light rail for cities such as Cork and Galway and the DART+ projects. I am delighted to see that the MetroLink for Dublin's north side is progressing, but we want to see its expansion out to Dublin South-West and elsewhere as well. We need a well-connected active travel network across our major cities and between towns and villages in rural Ireland. We need to see a renewed commitment, a real vigour, from this Government to get these vital transport projects over the line sooner rather than later.

As I said in the Chamber last week, this crisis must also serve as a reminder to the Government of the urgent need to wean ourselves off imported fossil fuels. Our economy remains far too reliant on them. We are 20 years behind where we could have been in terms of offshore wind generation. We have a wealth of renewable potential off our coasts that is almost entirely untapped. We have literally one offshore wind farm, in Arklow, built more than two decades ago, and it is no longer generating any energy. I have serious questions about our target of 5 GW of offshore generation by 2030, given the pace of developments so far. It is clearly not going to happen.

I was left baffled in many ways by the Taoiseach's performance during Leaders' Questions yesterday. He said at one stage that Ireland is a "renewables success story". While I acknowledge we have made some good progress in terms of onshore generation, I do not see how failing to utilise our greatest asset, which is our offshore potential, can be characterised as a success story. It is not a success to be so far behind in our transition to clean renewable energy that the Taoiseach's predecessor once called our country a "climate laggard", and he was right.

In any case, any new renewable energy that we are generating is not going towards decarbonising important sectors of our economy; it is being gobbled up by the huge energy demands of data centres. Essentially what we are seeing is the good work that we are doing in terms of renewables benefiting not ordinary households or small businesses, but faceless multinationals. That is not a success story; it is an outrage, and it is only going to get worse with the continued data centre proliferation that is being enabled by this Government without putting the necessary safeguards in place. The Government's large energy user action plan has utterly failed in that regard and the proposed private wires law will only further the expansion of data centres and their continued expansion and use of fossil fuel generation.

I acknowledge that data centres have a role in our economy and our society in terms of enabling our access to modern technologies, but we have to be honest: they are huge sources of pollution and they are placing an unbelievable strain on our energy grid. Alongside soaking

up all of our renewable energy, it is anticipated that they will account for more than 30% of our total energy consumption within the next couple of years. Even the former finance Minister, Pascal Donohoe, has warned in his new role of the huge water consumption issues that data centres bring and the dangers for countries that go along with that.

I was left further baffled yesterday when the Taoiseach continued to insist on the Government's plans to import liquified natural gas, LNG, a highly polluting fossil fuel, for energy security purposes, given that he later acknowledged that every energy crisis since the 1970s has been due to a crisis in fossil fuels arising out of a conflict.

I appreciate the Taoiseach's acknowledgement that the source of market volatility, and the reason people are currently being fleeced, is the crises in oil and gas, but I cannot fathom how anyone would think the solution to ensuring energy security in future is further entrenching fossil fuels in our system through the construction of new fossil fuel infrastructure. This Government should seriously reconsider its plans for its strategic gas reserve. We need a new energy security analysis in light of this most recent crisis. This was recommended by the Joint Committee on Climate, Environment and Energy in its pre-legislative scrutiny report on the Government's LNG bill. The European benchmark price for LNG soared by as much as 60% in the days following the start of Trump and Netanyahu's illegal war in Iran, following the shut-down of a major LNG facility in Qatar. The Government has estimated that its proposed LNG terminal will cost almost €1 billion, paid for of course by ordinary bill payers. The likely increase in that cost arising out of conflicts like the one we are seeing at present underscores the irresponsibility of going ahead with this proposal. We simply cannot secure our energy supply by further exposing ourselves to price shocks like this. We are already vulnerable to an increasingly unstable geopolitical arena, and ordinary households and commuters are paying the price. Charging ahead with the introduction of even more fossil fuels to Ireland will only make matters worse. As I said previously, the solution to our energy security needs lies off our coast. Government inertia in building up our offshore capacity can no longer be tolerated. The urgency we have seen from the Government in rushing through the legislation for this LNG terminal needs to be redirected towards meeting our 5 GW offshore target and getting the projects currently in the pipeline delivered.

I want to touch briefly on the issue of price gouging. The case for an investigation by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, CCPC, is clear. Within hours of this war beginning, we saw prices soar for home heating oil and at the petrol pump despite the fact that, as we know, fuel stocks are bought well in advance. The fuels being supplied in the hours immediately after the outbreak of the conflict would have been bought at a much lower rate, but they were being sold based on the present wholesale price. The fuel providers - never ones to waste a crisis - saw an opportunity and went for it. It was frankly insulting to hear Fuels for Ireland, the industry lobby group, tell consumers the other day not to expect a reduction in their fuel costs immediately following the cuts to excise duty and the NORA levy. Its excuse was that the fuels being sold would have been purchased in advance at a higher rate. I would be willing to accept that argument if it did not imply that for some reason, fuels bought in advance of these cuts cannot be charged at a lower rate, but the fuels bought prior to the outbreak of the war had to be charged based on the wholesale price at the time consumers were filling up their cars. It is absolutely outrageous. I welcome the instruction given by the Minister for enterprise to the CCPC to conduct a review of the retail energy market. On many occasions in this House, I have called out the poor behaviour of energy companies and the dysfunction of our

supposedly competitive market. However, it must go further than a simple review. The Minister must instruct the CCPC to conduct a stand-alone investigation into potential price gouging in the hours after this latest conflict in the Middle East began, and the failure to immediately pass on any cuts in excise duty.

I will conclude by cautiously welcoming this legislation, which will temporarily reduce the excise duty, cut the NORA levy and extend the fuel allowance, but the Government could and should have gone further. We know we cannot tax-cut our way out of our over-reliance on fossil fuels and our overexposure to the whims of a warmongering US President. We need to look ahead towards real solutions to shield ourselves from future oil shocks to the greatest extent possible, and that means building up our renewables capacity.

Deputy Duncan Smith: I will pick up on what my colleague, Deputy Ahern, was speaking about. We are living in an era in which shock events are becoming more regular due to irrational, unpredictable and, quite frankly, dangerous leadership among the big powers. The world's reliance on fossil fuels has become the source of global conflict. The ultimate impact of this is not only that it causes deaths in those regions where the wars are taking place, but also that it has an economic shock on ordinary workers and ordinary households elsewhere in the world. In this country, we have reacted to the Russia-Ukraine war, to this current conflict and to the Covid crisis by introducing a suite or basket of emergency measures which are then subject to debate, controversy and discussion across this House. There are commonalities emerging in these shock events in terms of how they impact our people and communities. We need to prepare for these events better. We are still overly reliant on fossil fuels, so we are going to have to be able to react quicker to these events.

We do not need new legislation to facilitate a maximum price order, for example, because it is something that the Government, along with a price freeze at the fuel pump, can implement overnight with the stroke of a pen. That can be done based on current legislation, without introducing new legislation, when America, Russia or another power starts a war or escalates continuing conflicts. The Minister's Government has not chosen to do this. Three and a half weeks later, as my colleagues Deputy Ahern and Deputy Nash and the Opposition more generally have said, a suite of measures is being brought in which, quite frankly, does not go far enough. We are not preparing.

We know that work practices in this country are over-reliant on fossil fuels. Too many people have to get into their cars in the morning to go to work because we have not invested enough in public transport. There are improvements and exciting projects on the way, including DART+ and MetroLink in my constituency, but there are still too many people getting into their cars in the morning who do not have to do so. They could stay at home and work productively, efficiently, effectively and happily in the public or private sector. We need to look at the rules in this State. Obviously, we have proposed legislation that would empower people to work from home and give them real rights and protections. Given that the Government seems intent on not supporting that legislation, when shock events happen the Government should impose work from home orders to enable people who can work from home to do so at a moment's notice without fear of repercussions from their bosses.

The suite of measures that are being announced in other European countries, such as Spain, Greece and the UK, go further and deeper. They have reacted a little more quickly than we

have. Nobody is perfect and no government or State is reacting perfectly to these shock events, but we have to adapt our responses to the reality of the world as it exists now. There are many articles about a show currently on Netflix that is set in the 1990s that are about how it seems like a much calmer time. Compared to where we are now, it was like another world. We are now in the 2020s, when fossil fuels are being fought over. We have a klepto-fascist in the White House who is engaging in what seems to be, among his many crimes, the manipulation of the markets for profit and the use of the office of the United States President for personal and familial gain. We are in a territory we never thought we would be in, but I think we are still playing by 1990s rules, almost. We are not adapting and we are not flexible, despite all these shock events, conflicts and wars. Despite all the things that are becoming more familiar, and the impact they are having on home heating oil, fuel pumps, congestion and climate, we are still reacting as if it was 30 years ago and not as if it is the 2020s. We need to look at how we are shaping our State to react to the actions of the disastrous leaders of the most powerful states who are tearing the world apart at present.

Deputy John Clendennen: I thank the Minister for his time here today. I welcome this legislation - the National Oil Reserves Agency (Amendment) Bill - and its important and timely measures. It is being introduced in a moment of real pressure on households, businesses and our wider community, when we need a measured response. In recent months, as other speakers have alluded to, global energy markets have been significantly disrupted by conflict in the Middle East and the Gulf, a conflict I hope can be brought to an end. That is fundamentally the element of uncertainty here. When we wake up every day, we hope we will see the end of this conflict and we can bring some sort of normality back to our economies and the likes of our fuel prices. They are far beyond our shores, but nonetheless they have real consequences here at home.

We have seen a rapid and sharp increase in the cost of fuel at the pumps, increased transportation costs and increased costs of home heating, all placing a real strain on our day-to-day expenses.

This Bill is necessary as part of the suite of measures announced by the Government yesterday, measures that I support. I fundamentally believe they will help people as they go to work today and try to heat their homes, and will make a material difference from a Government perspective, considering the unpredictability that we talk about. The reduction in the NORA levy in the next two months will work alongside the reduction in excise duty, the expansion of the diesel rebate scheme and the extension of the fuel allowance.

I support the element of flexibility provided by the Minister in the Bill. While we hope the conflict can be resolved, and hope for market stability to return, we simply do not know what the future holds. The Bill proposes a targeted and practical intervention, a temporary adjustment that reduces the levy for a defined period but also allows the flexibility for the Minister to extend it, should that be necessary. Today, we can directly lower the cost of fuel at a time when we need relief most. However, this is definitely not a long-term solution to energy challenges, nor does it replace the need for continued investment in sustainable and secure energy systems. If anything, these recent weeks and months have highlighted how important it is that we pursue long-term climate and energy goals and strive for more energy independence. The Bill maintains balance and provides relief now. It does not dismantle the framework that ensures Ireland's strategic oil reserves remain robust and secure. Ultimately,

the Bill is about being responsive and ensuring stability. It recognises the pressures facing our citizens by taking clear steps to ease them, while preserving our capacity to plan for tomorrow. Under NORA, we are obliged under EU law and International Energy Agency rules to hold at least 90 days' worth of oil imports in reserve.

Many constituents who contacted me this morning expect the prices at the pump to reduce overnight. If some of these companies were half as smart in reducing the price as they were in increasing it, they would do a service to consumers today. It is irresponsible how they are behaving. We are seeing price gouging. What we need to see is the CCPC being given more powers and resources to equip it with the necessary tools to address this as quickly as possible. I would like the message to go from here today that, regardless of the commentary from Fuels for Ireland, we need to see the prices reduce and be passed on as soon as possible at the pumps.

Where we are today is a similar position to the one my county found itself in five or six years ago, when, overnight, a decision on a planning application showed that we could no longer rely on fossil fuels and carbon fuels. The Minister has visited County Offaly in recent times and has seen the progress we have made. That did not happen by accident. We took brave, ambitious and plan-led decisions at times when other counties decided not to because that was the easiest thing to do. We need to plan for tomorrow now. Essentially, what that will entail is reducing our dependency on fossil fuels.

As for what we have done in Offaly, we have seen the development of a significant infrastructure of wind turbines, solar farms and battery storage. In January alone, with only 2% of the country's landmass, Offaly was the top generator of renewable energy in the country. Many speakers come into this Chamber and tell us what we should be doing as a country. Maybe they should take that message back to their own counties. Everyone should step up to the mark and follow the lead that we have taken as a county. That did not just happen on bogland or vast fields. It started in primary schools, with initiatives led by bodies like Midlands Ireland and Offaly County Council, and by individuals like Ray Bell in his work on STEM initiatives, such as VEX Robotics. Less than ten years ago, in Offaly, there was not one primary school engaging in any element of engineering in the curriculum. Today, we can proudly say that every primary school is competing in VEX Robotics. We have a situation where multiple schools every year are competing on a global stage at the VEX Robotics world championships.

We need to invest in education and ensure that we invest in engineers for the future. That needs to continue right through from primary school to postgraduate. Even today, in committee, we heard from some of the engineering representative groups that we need a greater level of funding for postgraduate courses so we continue to see a steady flow of new graduates in the engineering space. One thing that should not stand in the way of this development is funding. In recent years and months, I have dealt with schools that qualified to go to Texas for the world championship of VEX Robotics but they did not have the funding, and they had to go to local companies or the local authority. It should be a no-brainer. We should ensure there is a scheme in place where such a scenario arises. Where extracurricular activities and subjects are contested at the global level, we need to get behind those schools and classes, and ensure that Offaly is excelling at the highest level. I recognise those schools like Tubber National School, the Sacred Heart in Tullamore and Coláiste Choilm, which made it to Texas and represented the county and the country so proudly.

I also look at what we have done with regard to home energy upgrades. In the past five years, we have seen almost 5,000 homes across Offaly upgraded for home energy. This is a county where, in the last census, up to 50% of homes outlined that they had a dependency on fossil fuels. We are taking those steps. There is a step change in Offaly, and we are doing this in an ambitious way. However, we cannot leave communities behind. All too often, where we have designated spatial planning for renewables, we are seeing companies come in where we have not designated spatial planning. That is a total kick in the face for people who took a very ambitious step in recent years to ensure we could meet our ambitious targets.

I ask that the wind energy guidelines be produced and published as soon as possible. With regard to home heating, I ask the Minister to look at measures like the blending of HVO, with a view to increasing that to a level that is sustainable and achieves our emissions targets, and also works for the sector, communities and homeowners. With regard to reducing our dependency on carbon fuels, I ask the Minister to look at a boiler scrappage scheme. There are hundreds of thousands of boilers that have been in circulation for ten years or more, and they are simply inefficient. Yes, the dream is to get everyone to an earth water heat pump or district heating but that is not feasible in many situations. I ask the Minister to seriously consider a boiler scrappage scheme in the time ahead. Greater recognition for wood pellet stoves is another option that needs to be considered. I am not overlooking what the Minister has done in the whole area of deep retrofit grants, where the increased grants have been very welcome. However, they cause disruption, particularly to older people. That is where I would see something like a boiler scrappage scheme, wood pellets or HVO being an intermediary as we move to where we want to go with this whole objective.

As I said, communities cannot be left behind from a benefit fund perspective. In Offaly, there is €50 million in the pipeline for a renewable energy community benefit fund scheme in the coming years. We do not want to spend it all on sports jerseys or scoreboards. We want to see long-lasting legacy projects like community centres and swimming pools developed in towns and villages across the county. The Minister should use Offaly as a pilot. We are ahead of the curve. We are pioneering in this space to ensure we get it right for the rest of the country.

In Offaly, coming from the bogland heritage that we have and the relationship we had with Bord na Móna and the ESB, we are proud of what we have done. We have stepped forward in the national interest. When I hear of companies looking to invest further in renewables, and they talk about the delays with EirGrid, the lack of response and the need to get it done faster, that should not be happening. We are in a state of emergency. We need EirGrid, as much as anyone, to step up to the mark to ensure that investment in the grid is developed at an expedited rate. We need to engage with companies that want to invest, whether that is in further renewable energy development or data centres. I am not going to stick my head in the sand and think that we can just move on and let this data go elsewhere. We see tens of billions of investment in other countries, while we are missing an opportunity to develop ecosystems in places like Rhode Green Energy Park in Offaly. If we can get the planning permission sorted there, and if we can get companies to row in behind it, we can create an ecosystem of economic benefit and job creation in our local communities.

I recognise the €1.1 billion the Government has put together already in relation to budget 2026 in the area of energy. I recognise the significant billions of euro in investment the

Government has committed to the grid. There is also the increase in allocation and eligibility of the fuel allowance and the backdating of it to January.

When I talk about the national interest, I have to ask what Sinn Féin's purpose has been in recent weeks. Has it been to increase its ratings in the polls or is it genuine? I recognise the likes of the Social Democrats and Labour, which voted with the Government last night. However, Sinn Féin has proposed nothing in relation to the fuel allowance and has done nothing to support hard-pressed households in Northern Ireland. It has done nothing to get its calculations right. To come into this Chamber and claim a cost of €38 million per week when it was actually €3 million is irresponsible. Sinn Féin Members need to get their act together and realise we need to work together in this Chamber for the best interests of this nation.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: He has left now, but I want to acknowledge Senator Wilson and the officials he brought visiting here, representing Taiwan in their Dublin office. They are very welcome and I hope they enjoy their day in Dáil Éireann.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: While Government backbenchers might not wish to acknowledge it, workers and families are being hammered under the watch of this Government. Petrol and diesel prices are rising sharply and the Government response is too late and nowhere near strong enough. Households are already stretched and we see it not just in energy but across the board: food costs and school costs are up. The costs of getting to work, doing the school run, caring for family and just living in rural Ireland are increasing.

The Government has choices and it chose not to deliver the maximum fuel cuts available. What we saw last night was meanness laid bare - too late, stingy, divorced from reality and frankly insulting. Over 750,000 households rely on home heating oil and they are being left behind. The cost of a fill has surged to between €1,600 and €1,800, depending on what day it is and where in the country you live. The Government's response has been tokenistic: a short fuel allowance extension that will be wiped out by rising prices and a measly 2 cent reduction on heating oil.

The Taoiseach's response yesterday during Leaders' Questions was illustrative when he joked that it is okay because it will be May soon. People are in energy arrears and are struggling to heat their homes. There are cold snaps at the end of March and people rely on home heating oil for hot water, including people looking after older or unwell family members at home. It is not good enough for the Government and the Taoiseach, as Head of Government, to make jokes about these things. Energy poverty and child poverty are growing and people are rationing heat. We have heard some of the stories. Some of us engage with our constituents in constituency offices and clinics. I know it might be uncomfortable for some people on the opposite side to do that from time to time but those of us who engage and listen hear those stories every day. I am not talking about the Minister but many of his colleagues do not operate clinics or offices. The Government could have removed excise on home heating oil and delivered real relief but once again chose not to act.

This crisis is hitting those who produce in our economy. Fishermen and other primary producers face soaring fuel costs without any meaningful support. The impact spreads through coastal and rural communities. When coastal and rural enterprises are squeezed, their local economies suffer. It is kicking a sector when it is already down.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: It has been nearly a month since Israel and its proxy, the United States, began their war on Iran. For the past month, people across Ireland have been hit with what can only be described as rip-off fuel prices. In some cases, Irish fuel prices have increased at eight times the rate of other EU states. It is only now, after nearly a month, that we have seen any action from the Government. To be frank, its measures are an embarrassment compared with the actions of other EU states. While the Government sat on the fence, it quietly cashed in at the expense of ordinary workers trying to get to work or the vulnerable trying to heat their homes. This is appalling conduct from the Government. Let us talk about the measures it announced yesterday.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Give me some examples of what they did in Europe.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: Three cent off the price of green diesel is not support; it is a slap in the face to farmers and fishermen across Ireland. The Government may as well have just told them to shut up and get on with it. These are the people who go out day in, day out to produce top-quality Irish food and to ensure we have food security and our shelves do not go empty. While the reduction will be welcomed by those in haulage, do not forget who produces the food to fill those trucks. Not using farm machinery or trawlers is not an option. Does the Minister expect ponies and traps and carts to be rolled out to cut down on the cost? Is that what he wants them to do? We have seen over and over from Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael that our farmers and fishermen are always an afterthought. The announcement yesterday is just the latest insult to them. It is simply a kick in the teeth.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: Politics, for better or worse, has made me occasionally suspicious of things. When things happen suddenly or without warning, I wonder what exactly is happening. I am a bit of a nerd, I have to admit. I like maths, numbers and researching things I am interested in. After a few hours of researching this amendment and looking at the Bill, I find what the Government is doing deeply troubling. I want to be really clear here. We in the Social Democrats have supported the Government on reductions in excise and on relief for hauliers. We are even willing to support half of this Bill to relieve two months of the levy. However, it turns out this Bill also authorises something the Minister did not acknowledge in his opening remarks. I am severely disappointed by the lack of transparency from the Minister, his Department and the Government. What he is proposing is the authorisation of a 20-month raiding of the climate action fund. That is what this Bill does. It would be better called the climate action fund reversal Bill.

I will take Deputies through how I came across this. It was deliberately obfuscated from the Dáil.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: It is not a very long Bill.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: It is not, but it is a very significant provision that the Government has put into it. Let me take Deputies through how I came across it. The Government has deliberately obfuscated this from the Dáil and it is a very serious matter for Government backbenchers, in particular.

On the face of it, the change to the Order of Business to add to the agenda an amendment to the National Oil Reserves Agency Act 2007 does not seem like a big deal. Any reasonable person recognises the fallout of the illegal war initiated by the United States and Israel against Iran and its people would have consequences in Ireland. It is far-reaching. Therefore, maybe we needed to do something with the national oil reserves, but when I read the amendment proposed within the past 24 hours and put on the agenda this morning, it did not refer to releasing oil reserves. That power is already granted by the 2007 Act. It did not talk about increasing supply to provide relief to hard-pressed families. No, it had something about pausing a levy of 2 cent per litre. Again, that does not seem like a big deal given excise went down by 17 cent per litre last night, which we in the Social Democrats supported.

I dug a little deeper. That 2 cent is the total funding for the National Oil Reserves Agency, coming to about €120 million in income for the agency in 2024, according to its financial statements. The Bill proposes in the first instance to effectively get rid of that levy for the next few months, which is reasonable - laudable, even. We are in an energy crisis, after all.

But then there is this other measure in the Bill, section 1(b). This provision says the Minister can suspend the levy after those two months for a while if he wants. Maybe that is reasonable. The question is for how long, how much it costs and what effect it has. The amendment says he can suspend it to December 2027, a potential 18-month additional suspension of the levy. That is strange. We did not do that for the excise taxes or hauliers last night. It is quite an odd thing to do. What is also odd is that the Minister can do it at his sole discretion. That is interesting. Ministers can do things at their sole discretion all the time through statutory instruments but it is strange to create a brand new statutory instrument within 24 hours, so it made me a little more suspicious.

The Minister will have to forgive me. I decided to look at the finances. It turns out the run rate for the levy is about €10 million per month.

Two months would cost €20 million, which means 18 more months would cost a whopping €180 million. A potential €200 million reduction in the public finances is worrying. With this Bill, the Dáil is being asked, in effect, to pre-approve a tax cut of up to €200 million at the sole discretion of one Minister. It is very strange.

Last night, the Dáil sat until 11 p.m. to authorise a package of €250 million. Today, it seems the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, can just change the fiscal position of the strategic oil reserves by €200 million with the flick of a pen and with no oversight by the Dáil, no authorisation from the Cabinet and absolutely no one else involved. Not even the Minister for Finance can bring in a tax cut without the Taoiseach authorising it. A €200 million tax cut is a very big deal. It has consequences for the fiscal and financial position of the State.

According to its financial statements, the National Oil Reserves Agency collected €120 million in 2024. It did something with that money. Can the Minister tell me what it was? I will yield 30 seconds of my time under Standing Order 61 if the Minister can answer that question.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Hayes should continue.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: Can you tell me the answer, Minister?

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I could do so but I will wait until the end to respond to the debate.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: The National Oil Reserves Agency gave €100 million, or more than 80% of the levy, to the climate action fund that was set up by an amendment to the legislation in 2020. It turns out that is virtually the entirety of all funding for the climate action fund. The fund was set up to support a few really important things, as detailed in its 2024 annual report. In that year, it gave €8 million to a community climate action programme for local authorities, €10 million to the school photovoltaic programme to fund solar panels for schools, €17 million to the Bórd na Móna bog rehabilitation scheme, some of which was perhaps spent in County Offaly, and €58 million to the public sector energy efficiency scheme to reduce energy demand, which one might think would reduce prices.

This is not about strategic oil reserves, relief for consumers or good governance. It is an open raiding of the climate action fund in the middle of an energy crisis. The Government gave a tax cut to developers and fast food chains in the latest budget but that was not enough. Now the Minister wants to steal the future of climate action while he is at it, with no oversight and no transparency. Everything is being hidden from the Oireachtas and even from the Government's own backbenchers. The Minister's actions will deprive this country of the climate action this crisis has shown it desperately needs.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: I will return later in my contribution to the aspects of the debate my party colleague has raised. The 2 cent reduction in the NORA levy is a drop in the ocean for homeowners and householders who are relying on home heating oil, the hundreds of thousands of people who are not going to benefit from the excise cuts, which the Social Democrats supported, and the people who will continue to find it very difficult to put a half-fill or a fill of oil in their tanks. The Social Democrats have repeatedly acknowledged that we are in the middle of a crisis that will require emergency-type solutions in the short term that can offer some level of respite to people. This reduction of 2 cent is the absolute bare minimum and it really will not make much difference to people.

Instead, what the Minister should have done is target the use of public money to support people who are most in need. We have repeatedly asked him to bring in a €400 electricity credit targeted at the people in the lowest 40% of the income distribution. That would assist 800,000 people in this country with their energy bills. We are not calling for a broad-brush energy credit because that would not be targeted. This was consistently our position in the previous Dáil. There is a huge wastage of public money in the non-targeting of such measures. The best, simplest and quickest way to assist every person who is really suffering from the high cost of electricity and gas following the Ukraine crisis, and now the high cost of petrol, diesel and home heating oil as a result of the current war, is to provide a targeted energy support. It is unfortunate that the Government has not done so. We in the Social Democrats hope that at some stage in the very near future it will bring forward that energy credit.

This crisis did not start four weeks ago. There are many people still trying to recover from the impact of the high energy costs incurred as a result of the Ukraine crisis. The ESRI has advised against the approach of introducing measures that are not targeted. It has shown that the last time this approach was used, 50% of the cost of the measure went to the top 40% of

households. The statistics are there to show this is not the best way to deal with these issues. A targeted approach is certainly the preference of the Social Democrats.

In the absence of that, we have supported the excise reduction and we will support the 2 cent reduction in the NORA levy. However, as my party colleague has stated, we have concerns about this Bill. It is much more far-reaching than what was originally proposed, which was just a two-month cut. The Social Democrats have consistently supported carbon tax because we understand we need to move away from fossil fuels and fossil fuel subsidies and ensure people who are least able to do so can transition away from those fuels. The revenue collected from carbon tax offered the Government an opportunity to ensure a just transition. There was a chance to use that money to ensure lower income families can have warm homes, lower energy costs and an opportunity to avail of solar panels and electric cars. These are the changes we all need to make but lower income families will find it much more challenging to do so. That is why the Social Democrats have always supported carbon tax.

However, I find it bizarre that at the same time the Government is being critical of Sinn Féin for not supporting the carbon tax on the basis that the money is ring-fenced and will go to energy and climate action measures, it is, in essence, doing the exact same thing with the NORA fund. It is just called something different. A lot of people do not understand where the money from the NORA levy goes and for what it is used. The Government is using that to its advantage and is really just playing with words here. It is incredibly disappointing that the Bill includes a mechanism for ministerial discretion to extend these provisions for 18 months.

The climate action fund plays an incredibly important role in supporting communities, small businesses, households and the public service to implement climate action measures. The ESB availed of the climate action fund to put in charging stations all across the country. Schools are using money from the fund to put solar panels on their buildings. A huge range of very important measures are being supported by this fund. Why would the Minister want to take money out of those programmes? Why would he decide this is the best place to find State funding to support people who are facing huge difficulties because of the war in Iran?

Why is the Government sticking so closely to carbon tax, stressing how important that is and being very critical of other parties for not supporting it while at the same time doing exactly the same thing? When talking about extending this to 18 months, it is important that the Minister explain to us the programmes he is planning to cut. Will he cut community climate action projects, retrofitting of public buildings, electricity charging infrastructure, solar PV and district heating projects? Will he cut all those? Will he cut the climate officers in the local authorities? Which local authorities will he pull climate officers from? These projects are all fundamentally dependent on the revenue streams from NORA.

There has to be some honesty in this discussion and it is unfortunate it has not been there so far. We are only on Second Stage and we have tabled an amendment to that effect. We would ask the Minister to seriously consider that amendment because this provision does not need to be extended beyond two months, in the same manner that the excise reduction has not been extended for longer than two months. So, we would ask that you actually seriously consider this, Minister. Minister?

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Tá mé ag éisteach. I can walk and chew gum at the same time. I am actually explaining to the Minister of State, Deputy Dooley, what Deputy Whitmore is saying so that he understands the Social Democrats' position. I am trying to be helpful.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: I will speak to both Ministers then. I would ask that they look at the amendments we put forward and not use this Bill to extend this provision to 18 months and essentially pull all the funding that is going into the climate action fund for things like solar PV for schools, EV charging units, the community action funds, and the community and climate officers in the different local authorities. Many really important projects are funded by this scheme. Please do not use this as a way to pull the funding for 18 months. This is €200 million that should be going to climate action and to support communities so that they can actually move away from fossil fuels, which apparently is an aim of the Government. Please do not pull that money from them.

We will be debating this later on but I would ask-----

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: We will helpfully respond to that.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: I thank the Minister.

I also want to talk about price-gouging. The CRU was mentioned earlier. The CSO reported this week that wholesale electricity prices have dropped by 72% since the peak in August 2022. We have not seen a 72% reduction in retail prices here in Ireland and indeed many people are still really suffering from the incredible costs of electricity and gas as a result of the invasion of Ukraine. The Minister has called on the CRU to look into aspects of price-gouging in the energy sector and to consider what level of pass-through is occurring from wholesale to retail. That was a recommendation of the task force last year. I have not heard anything back from the CRU yet. Within its legislation, the CRU has the provisions to be able to do this anyway. It is something it should be doing on a regular basis and not waiting for a Minister to direct it to do so. It has responsibility for ensuring fairness in the energy markets for consumers. It should have the wherewithal to use the legislation that is available to it and to do this when it deems it fit. However, it seems very lax when it comes to these kinds of matters. It waits for there to be a public outcry and for a Minister to direct it. I do not understand how it does not see it as a normal part of its remit. Anyway, we have not seen any response or any report from the CRU and it is really important that that happens.

Alongside that, the CCPC also needs to investigate price-gouging by petrol and diesel retailers. It was very clear, pretty much immediately after the war in Iran started, that forecourt prices would skyrocket and that has continued. We all suspect that there has been price-gouging and there has to be accountability for it because if there is not accountability, we will not stop them from doing it every time there is an issue like this. It is really important that that happens and that it happens quickly.

We also need to ensure that any of the excise cuts and now the NORA cut are passed on to consumers. It needs to go directly into people's pockets and not into the pockets of the retailers. I ask the Minister of State to ensure that happens because it is fundamentally important when it comes to not just these measures but the trust the public have in the implementation of these measures.

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the measures announced by the Government to address the ongoing fuel and energy cost crisis, which continues to place real and sustained pressure on households, families and businesses right across the country.

I cannot but comment on the pure hypocrisy of Sinn Féin on the far side of the House, whose previous speakers unanimously opposed last night's motion to help families and businesses right across the country. Last Thursday in this Chamber, the deputy leader of Sinn Féin called for a 20 cent reduction in excise duty. Last night he and his colleagues voted against a 22 cent excise duty reduction. It is all spin and bluster.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Did the Government do the 22 cent reduction then?

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere: The only thing we ever get from Sinn Féin Members is a permanent "No". That is their contribution to Irish politics, a permanent "No". There is nothing to them and nothing in them. They would want to start coming forward with proper, credible policies instead of just going against everything.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Did the Government do the 22 cent reduction?

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere: When you are against everything, you are for nothing and Sinn Féin is for nothing.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Did the Government do the 22 cent reduction?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere: They are going out and whinging with no credible proposal being brought forward. Last week they said they would bring forward a 20 cent reduction. Why, five days later, do they go against a 22 cent reduction?

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Did the Government do the 22 cent reduction?

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere: Why did they all vote against it?

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Did the Government do it?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy-----

Deputy Cathy Bennett: The people in the Deputy's constituency want it. Did the Government do it? No.

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere: The Deputy is talking out of both sides of her mouth as usual. The country can see through it and we are all sick of listening to her and her colleagues. They

are going at it the whole time, left, right and centre. There is nothing to them. There is absolutely no substance and they have no credibility. Everybody can see through it.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I am sure all the Deputy's constituents are delighted to see-----

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere: It is important to acknowledge that action has been taken and that action is absolutely welcome. The reduction in excise on petrol and diesel alongside a significant cut to the NORA levy will provide immediate and tangible relief at the pumps, not just "No" politics for the sake of "No" politics. For many working people, particularly those in rural areas, who rely heavily on their cars, that relief cannot come soon enough.

Equally the decision to extend supports for home heating, particularly for more vulnerable households, is a recognition of the very real concern and anxiety that people feel when faced with rising energy bills. These are practical steps and they will make a real difference. I welcome the additional four weeks on the fuel allowance, which will make a huge difference to families right across the country.

We must also recognise the targeted supports for key sectors of our economy. Hauliers, bus operators and those who keep goods and people moving have been under enormous strain due to the rise in diesel costs. Increasing the diesel rebate and backdating it is a sensible and necessary intervention to protect jobs, to make sure our economy is strong and to make sure we have a pot of money so that when we are hit with a crisis, we can actually put measures in place to help Irish families. If we have a surplus and keep taking out of it, we will end up with a deficit. I do not know if the Sinn Féin economic policy recognises that, but that is the reality of the situation.

While we all hope that stability will return, the reality is that uncertainty still remains. That is why it is equally important to focus on longer term actions being taken and indeed a lot of work needs to be done. We have seen significant progress in renewable energy in recent years.

4 o'clock

The growth in solar capacity, from just 2 MW in 2015 to over 2,400 MW today, is remarkable. It shows what can be achieved with the right policy focus and investment. Similarly, the increase in the share of electricity generated from renewables, now exceeding 40%, demonstrates that we are moving in the right direction. The expansion of rooftop solar, with over 155,000 homes supported and schools benefiting from insulations, is helping to reduce bills and empower consumers to generate their own energy. This is a positive development and one that should continue to be scaled up.

The supports for haulage and road passenger operations being introduced and the fuel allowance being extended by four weeks are protecting the most vulnerable in society. The extension of the fuel allowance season means that eligible households will receive additional financial support totalling €152. This Bill also provides scope for the Government to amend the time period by way of order at a later date if required. It is also important to note that temporary and targeted measures to reduce fuel prices for households and businesses, with additional supports for key sectors of the Irish economy, are being introduced and may be adjusted as the situation evolves. This is an evolving situation and has been since the crisis broke a couple of weeks ago.

In addition, the level of investment in retrofitting and energy efficiency must be acknowledged. Since 2019 over €1.6 billion has been provided to support hundreds of thousands of home energy upgrades. These measures not only reduce emissions but, crucially, reduce costs for households over the long term. However, we have to ask the question, are we moving quickly enough? Is there more that can be done? For many people who will be watching this debate, the reality is simple: bills are still too high and the cost of living remains a constant worry. While progress is being made, the benefits are not being felt evenly or widely enough. That is why I welcome the targeted measures that were introduced yesterday.

We also know that Ireland remains heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels. This leaves us exposed to geopolitical shocks, price spikes and uncertainty that is beyond our control, like the situation we find ourselves in at the moment. The current situation has only underlined that vulnerability. While we acknowledge the steps taken, we must also call for greater urgency: urgency in accelerating renewable energy projects, particularly offshore; urgency in upgrading and expanding our electricity grid in order that supply can meet demand; urgency in reforming planning processes to ensure that critical infrastructure can be delivered without unnecessary delay; and urgency in ensuring that supports reach those who need them most when they need them.

There is also a clear lesson from this crisis. We must ensure that our response as a State is agile, responsive and prepared for whatever challenges may come next. The reality is that global energy markets can shift rapidly due to conflict, supply disruptions or economic shocks. We must be in a position to act quickly to protect Irish consumers and Irish businesses. That means building flexibility into our policies, maintaining contingency measures that can be deployed when needed and ensuring that the Government has the tools to respond in real time. We cannot afford to be reactive; we must be ready. This is not about responding to a crisis; it is about building resilience for the future and ensuring that Irish households and businesses are not repeatedly at the mercy of global energy shocks.

The measures that have been recently announced are a step in the right direction. They will provide short-term relief and they demonstrate that this Government is responding to the challenges at hand. However, we cannot stop here. We have to be agile and flexible and we have to continue to act decisively, ambitiously and with a clear focus on delivering a more secure, more sustainable and more affordable energy future for all.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Ordinary families and workers understand that the Irish Government is not responsible for international energy crises. Where the frustration lies, however, is that what it is responsible for is Ireland's response, and its response has been lethargic, it is lacklustre and it has not been nearly good enough. Not only is it a delayed response but our starting point is actually worse than it need have been, given that the Government pulled the energy credits only a few months ago based on inflation figures it got wrong. With more than 300,000 households already in electricity arrears and a new crisis emerging, what people would have expected is a Government response that prioritised them and looked to protect them from the worst impact of price shocks. Instead they got a wait-and-see response, and now they get tokenism: on fuel allowance a paltry four-week extension, and limited intervention on petrol and diesel that simply does not cut it. It is not good enough. There is not even tokenism for those without a clue how they will pay for home heating oil. There is nothing at all. With all the credibility of snake oil salesmen, the Government continues

to tell farmers and rural people that they benefit from the carbon tax, a claim report after report has found to be completely baseless.

Sinn Féin's proposals would have delivered a €183 reduction on 1,000 litres of home heating oil; the Government's proposals do not. Sinn Féin has advocated a 25 cent reduction on the tax the Government raises from petrol and diesel.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, you are in Deputy O'Hara's time.

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere: You are against everything, Cathy.

An Ceann Comhairle: Excuse me, Deputy Cleere.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: These are measures that would have meaningfully supported ordinary workers, families and farmers-----

An Ceann Comhairle: You are over time, Deputy.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: -----but what the Government introduced yesterday did not do so.

Deputy Louis O'Hara: This crisis began at a time when households across the State were already bearing the brunt of a severe cost-of-living crisis, with 320,000 households in arrears on their energy bills, having been totally abandoned by the Government in the last budget. The half-measures announced by the Government yesterday are too little, too late. The Government has sat on its hands for the past four weeks, and only now has it brought forward limited measures to respond, very reluctantly and after sustained pressure from Sinn Féin and the general public.

The Government, however, went only halfway. It decided against the maximum excise cut on petrol and diesel. It decided to knock only a lousy 5 cent off a litre of green diesel, with another insulting reduction in the price of heating oil, just 2 cent per litre. It has not gone unnoticed that those in rural communities, farmers and households who rely on home heating oil and fuel for farming or to get from A to B have in particular been failed by the Government and thrown to the wolves when it comes to these measures. Some 750,000 households across this State rely on home heating oil. To make matters worse, the 2 cent reduction will be wiped out in a few weeks' time when the Government proceeds with its carbon tax increase. It could have removed the excise completely. It could scrap its carbon tax increase. That would have given meaningful relief to families struggling to heat their homes. The Government did not do so, however, because it is completely out of touch.

I appeal to Government Ministers to stop gaslighting the public when it comes to the carbon tax, saying the revenue is essential for climate action and ring-fenced for that purpose. That is absolute rubbish. The Government does not have a notion where that money is being spent, with hundreds of millions unaccounted for, according to the Comptroller and Auditor General. The Government's grant schemes represent a massive transfer of wealth from low-income to high-income households, according to researchers in Trinity College. The Government should stop spoofing, stop the carbon tax increases and support households.

Deputy Paul Murphy: This is a mean Government. We knew it was a mean Government already because we saw the last budget, which was a giveaway budget for the developers, a giveaway budget for Google and a giveaway budget for the fast food giants but it took money out of the pockets of ordinary people and targeted disabled people, in particular, with swingeing, mean cuts of over €1,400 per person per year. We therefore knew this was a mean Government already and we had that in our mind when we were thinking, "What will the Government do when under massive public pressure to do something to protect people from the renewed cost-of-living crisis?"

Looking at this proposal, however, this measure in particular, it is hard to imagine something meaner. There is a crisis out there. Close to one in five households uses home heating oil. The price of home heating oil has gone through the roof, almost doubled.

Many people are at a stage of needing to fill their oil tank after they have been through the winter but obviously still need to use their heating. The Government's response to the surge in oil prices caused by Trump and Israel's imperialist wars in the Middle East is to take off 2 cent per litre. This will then be wiped away in a month and a half by an increase in the carbon tax. It is hard to imagine something more mean and inadequate. People will get €20 off for a full fill of home heating oil. Instead of paying the guts of €2,000 they might pay €1,980, so €20 off. I do not really know why the Government is bothering because it is so utterly inadequate in resolving the crisis that people face. We know that people have entered into a new cost-of-living crisis that has come on the back of an existing cost-of-living crisis. We know the impact of that. Four in ten parents are either passing up meals or reducing their portion sizes so their kids can eat. This is incredible in one of the richest countries in the world in 2026. Over 40% of renters are in poverty or are at risk of poverty and over 300,000 people are in energy arrears.

How does all of that translate into people who are using home heating oil? A person cannot go into arrears on home heating oil. People cannot fill their tank and say that they will pay the supplier later. They have to pay them to get home heating oil. What all that means is that people do not fill up their tanks and they do not heat their homes. It means people, in 2026, living in cold homes, struggling to get by in cold homes. This will be predominantly poorer people and older people at this time when the Government has a massive budget surplus and refuses to use it to protect people. It is incredible. It stands in stark contrast to what went through last night for the hauliers where the Government backdated the reduction to 1 January, forward dated it to the end of June, while any of the measures being talked about for ordinary households are ending much sooner than that and none of them is being backdated. Fundamentally, what does this come down to? Why is the Government taking this approach? There are two reasons. One is the Government represents those who profit from the various crises such as the housing crisis, the cost-of-living crisis and the health crisis. The second is that the Government is tied to the idea of the market. It cannot use the massive financial resources that we have to protect people because that would mean interfering with the market. The fossil fuel market that the Government is responsible for keeping us so reliant on is not working for ordinary people. Now is the time to interfere with the market in a major way to protect people. The answer here is so clear. It is in our Bill that we introduced two years ago to provide price controls. On the issue of home heating oil, in our Bill, there would be a €1 per litre price cap. The cap would be €1.75 a litre for petrol and diesel, 25 cent per unit for electricity and 8 cent per unit for gas. That is the answer, combined with giving energy credits

to people paid for by the data centres and targeted measures for disabled people, those on fuel allowance and social protection payments. The core of it is to say, "We are going to set the price and we are going to give people certainty." Then we ensure that the price is met and that the flow of petrol, diesel and home heating oil continues by doing two crucial things. One is to empower the CRU to ensure profiteering is not taking place with people taking advantage of this crisis as they took advantage of the previous one. The second is to adjust fuel taxes accordingly to ensure that fuel can continue to be supplied. That is the answer and that is what would give people certainty at this moment.

The other thing we need to do is get away from our reliance on fossil fuel. There are also longer-term issues. The Government should please stop allowing more and more data centres. Please do not have the Taoiseach going to Donald Trump and the US and saying data centres are our priority when it has emerged that fewer than 2,000 people are employed in data centres, which use more electricity than all the homes in the State combined. Let us have State investment in renewable energy and a renationalisation of the energy system to give people affordable electricity and to have a rapid transition.

There are immediate things that could happen. We have been calling for free, frequent public transport for a long time. The Government might not be able to, at the drop of a hat, get the frequent part or provide for the expansion that we are calling for, although there are buses and storage that could be brought out. However, we could immediately have free public transport, or at the very least, if the Government will not do that, a 50% cut in public transport fares. People are struggling to get the money to put the petrol or diesel into their car to get to work. They should be given the option of getting on public transport at a significantly reduced rate, which would also create the habit in people of knowing that they could use public transport. These are the kinds of measures that we need to have immediately to break our reliance on fossil fuels.

Deputy Charles Ward: People across the country are waking up to the fact that in moments of real need, the Government again has failed to show up. It is completely unwilling to provide meaningful support where it matters the most. People have been abandoned and left to face the spiralling costs alone. What should have been a moment of leadership, compassion and decisive action instead has been a bluster of hesitation, and the people have suffered. They are met with a Bill that has very little to offer people in their real time of need. The Bill will do nothing for the people struggling in County Donegal. It could have given more but the Government has chosen not to. It has chosen not to help the people and they are already on the brink. They are facing a sudden, unexpected surge in costs that they could never have seen happen.

I know the Minister of State is receiving the same kind of calls and emails that I am receiving. People are absolutely desperate and in complete disillusion. They are wondering how they are going to make ends meet, pay their bills, feed their families and heat their homes, which are the basic needs of a human being. People are riddled with anxiety every time a letter comes through the door or the notification goes off in their banking app to tell them that there is less than €1 left in their account. I have had multiples of calls like this from people. My constituents are living basically down to their final pennies because they are trying to feed their families and heat their homes. What am I meant to say to them?

The Government is taking 2 cent per litre of home heating oil. At the end of the day, it is frustrating. The Government is giving with one hand and when the carbon tax comes in the next month, that will be taken away and we will be faced with the same crisis again, and the Government has offered them no solution. That to them equals no hope and people are in despair and overwhelmed by their circumstances. They cannot control their circumstances because they are trying to meet the basic needs of a human being. Last month in Donegal, 1,000 litres of home heating oil cost €940 while today it costs €1,650, which is a difference of over €700 in 20 days. The Government solution is to take 2 cent off a litre and give them €20 back from the €1,000 fill. It is crazy stuff. With that, it still costs €1,630 to fill a tank, which is still a €690 difference in 20 days. The €20 difference is a drop in the ocean that families cannot survive on, and the Government pretends that this is completely out of its control. Everybody says to the Government, "Look at what is happening in the North." In the North, 500 litres of home heating oil is €633 whereas it is €800 in Donegal. The truth is the Government can do more but it has chosen not to and the people are being abandoned. Households have seen their bills spiralling out of control. We have the highest electricity costs in Europe and now the highest heating costs as well. It is unfortunate and devastating for my constituents to be left in these situations. A mother phoned me today saying that she put €5 worth of fuel in her car to allow her to do three journeys to take her children to school six miles away. That will allow her to do so today, tomorrow and the day after and that is it, until she gets paid next Wednesday.

That is what we are down to. People with disabilities cannot afford to travel. They are stuck and isolated because there is no proper public transport to serve them. They are suffering because they still have to heat their houses, as do people who are living alone. The heat goes straight out the door for the owners of homes affected by defective concrete. They have to have the heating on all the time to keep the house warm. As everyone knows, with what is going on up in Donegal, the houses are riddled with damp. This is just putting more of a burden on them. Homeowners face impossible decisions every day. It is not getting any better. The families are working hard to provide a good life for their kids but it is now a question of eat or heat. That is what it has come down to. They feel abandoned.

I ask the Minister of State to please consider this because we are going to be back here in a month. There will be mass protests about this. There is no doubt about it. This 2 cent on a litre of fuel shows the Government does not feel what is going on on the ground and does not understand it. Hundreds of thousands of people rely on heating oil. They need help, not 2 cent.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Hundreds of thousands of people in this country are being impoverished and having hardship imposed on them because of the deranged lunatic in the White House, Donald Trump, and the psychopaths who run the Israeli regime and their bloodlust and warmongering. People in this country cannot pay their bills, cannot turn on their heating and, in some cases, cannot travel when they have disabilities because of the mad dog, Trump, and because of Netanyahu and the Israeli regime. Despite this, our Government still cannot condemn what Trump is doing. It cannot impose sanctions on the regime in Israel he is doing it with.

As we speak, there are people outside asking where is the occupied territories Bill to impose sanctions on Israel for its illegal occupation and its genocidal campaign against the Palestinians. There is now another reason to pass the Bill, which is that people in this country

cannot pay their bills because of what these psychopaths are doing. We still treat them as normal states. Has the Minister of State ever seen anything like Trump boasting about the murder of people? Whatever we might think about the Iranian regime, boasting and saying you will kill them all is the behaviour of a psychopath. If you wanted to define "psychopath", that is a psychopath and he is running the most powerful government in the world and collaborating with a regime that is in the dock for genocide.

By the way, the genocidal campaign against the Palestinians continues, including in the West Bank, and is being expanded into the ethnic cleansing of Lebanon, the explicit plan to occupy another country's territory, southern Lebanon, and waging a criminal war against Iran, which has now inflamed the entire Middle East and which is costing every single person in this country to the extent that some people cannot turn on the heating. Despite this, the Government cannot condemn it. It is not only that but it is also facilitating US troops, the people who are doing this to our people, at Shannon Airport. Never mind raining death and destruction on people in the Middle East and setting the world on fire, they are immiserating people here and yet these troops are going through Shannon Airport.

I know how forceful the Minister of State has been about Russia's illegal war in Ukraine. Imagine anybody suggesting that a representative of this country should go and give shamrock to Vladimir Putin, or to meet him at all, and say nothing about what he is doing in Ukraine and allow his troops to go through Shannon Airport. There would be outrage, yet the Government quietly allow US troops go through Shannon Airport while Trump and these psychopaths in the White House and in the Israeli regime continue these crimes. People here are suffering for those crimes, yet the Government continues to take no action whatsoever. It then throws back this pittance, 2 cent on the litre. It is absolutely pathetic. It is an insult. Of course, people, Trump's friends, are speculating on all of this. People are getting rich out of it while all this cost-of-living misery has been going on since 2021.

We are not Johnny-come-lately when it comes to addressing the very issues we are discussing. I have been looking back at our motion, which was the first motion on the cost of living to come before this House at the beginning of the cost-of-living crisis. We moved it on 6 October 2021. It referred to the need for price controls on electricity, fuel, petrol and home heating oil. It also referred to the need to boost the retrofitting of homes so that people could bring down their bills. It mentioned the cost of disability and addressing the poverty crisis that exists in this country and the number of people in energy poverty. Six years later, we are still dealing with the same issues. They have just got worse.

In all of that time, the profits of the energy companies of this country have gone through the roof. They have gone up and up. ESB profits, Energia profits and Bord Gáis profits have all gone up and up. People are speculating on oil and all of that kind of thing and they are all making profits at the expense of ordinary people who are suffering cost-of-living misery and who are unable to turn on the heating. Some 700,000 people in this country are living in poverty. They are living in poverty in one of the richest countries in the world. Despite all this, this is the best the Government can do.

The Government can do other things but refuses to do so. I honestly do not understand why unless it is because, as Deputy Murphy said, that the Government is not willing to stand up to these corporations. It can introduce price controls. Has that been done anywhere else? It has been done in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Croatia. Forms of price control have been

introduced in Spain and I think that has also been done in Italy. It can be done. The prices of these goods can be controlled to give security to people.

How do you pay for that? Just look at the profits that are being made. We should put a bit of a levy on the profits of the data centres, which are sucking up all of the electricity, or on the record €300 billion that was made in corporate profits last year. In fact, it was more than €300 billion. Profits have gone up by 200% to 300% over the past decade while ordinary people are being absolutely crucified. The Government will not do that, however. It is okay for those companies to profiteer while ordinary people suffer with this cost-of-living crisis.

The Government will not even call out the people who are choosing to make it worse, like Trump and the Israeli regime. It is fairly obvious to me. The double standards are clear. We cuddle up to the warmongers and the psychopaths. We refuse to sanction or condemn them. We grovel before them with shamrock and let their troops go through Shannon Airport. Might these people use a nuclear weapon if things do not go well for them? Some of them would. Some of the Republican senators who support Trump are actually suggesting the use of nuclear weapons. That is just how mad these people are. At what point do we call a stop to this madness and stand up to assert this country's noble tradition of opposition to empire? This country's struggle for freedom started with a struggle against empire, colonialism and the First World War. We should remember that history and heritage and show it some respect, along with showing respect for the ordinary people who are being crushed by this cost-of-living crisis.

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil: The world is quite a scary place right now from the war in the Middle East, including in Iran and Gaza and the West Bank in Palestine, to what we are seeing in Somalia and Russia's continuing onslaught on Ukraine. We experienced hikes in the prices of various goods and services, particularly energy, after the invasion of Ukraine. What we are seeing now is a multiple of that because the Strait of Hormuz plays a crucial role in the supply of oil worldwide and in the supply of rare earth minerals that are crucial to the manufacturing of components we use every day. In many circumstances, it is not just about the crude oil.

What the Government has announced needs to be welcomed. Members across the House acknowledge the difficulty people have been experiencing, particularly commuters in Kildare North going to and from work. There has been an increase in public transport and in the use of public transport but there continues to be a demand and a need for private transportation, particularly for people living out of town and for people with young children. This House needs to acknowledge that public transport works for some people but it does not work for a lot. For example, a family might have two or three children with different drop-off and pick-up times, as well as parents trying to get into work. These are considerations for people using private transport. It is not as simple as trying to ensure everybody uses public transport. However, it should be encouraged and recommended for everybody in the context of trying to take people off the roads and reduce congestion in our towns and villages. Maynooth, Celbridge, Naas, Leixlip, Kilcock and Clane are all choked with traffic. Public transport is one of the only means for us to move out of that particular scenario. I am also thinking of things such as ring roads like the one being constructed in Maynooth at the moment.

In terms of the measures being introduced, it has to be acknowledged that they are targeted, and we have to be cognisant that this is very fast changing situation in the Middle East. It makes sense to extend the fuel allowance by four weeks. It makes sense that community

welfare officers are liaising and working with families that are hard pressed and struggling at the moment.

What I would say to anybody listening, particularly in Kildare, is to please reach out to a community welfare officer if you are finding things difficult. If people are not sure how to contact a community welfare officer, feel free to contact me and my office. We will be more than happy to help, as we have been helping many families throughout Kildare.

When we discuss the entire package, it is important to put it into context that we did not take a knee-jerk reaction. There was a month of consideration and looking at how things were playing out and things are yet to play out. It is likely that the price of oil will increase drastically again. What are we to do in that circumstance? The State cannot intervene in every single circumstance. It can only do so much and go as far as possible. We have to think about further down the line when there may be a particular and a desperate need and more of a need. I am not saying that there is not a need now but during the winter months in particular is when the need for home heating is most prevalent. I am not saying it is not prevalent and needed now but we have to be prepared for what might come and is likely to come later this year. We cannot use all of the finances and abilities at our disposal at the beginning of such an event. We have to be cognisant of this and think strategically and long term about how to look after the welfare of the people of this State not just in the days and weeks ahead, but in the months and years ahead. That is what this proposal does. It looks at the situation strategically and the Government is trying to be cognisant of that fact. It is also acting responsibly. I make that argument strongly. It was not a knee-jerk reaction. It was done in line with European Central Bank, ECB, and International Monetary Fund, IMF, advice. If we are to do things in an international context, we have to do what is best practice and what is recommended not only by experts in this country, but international experts such as the ECB and the IMF.

This brings me on to the entire issue around energy and energy security in this State. There is a debate ongoing. We went through the pre-legislative scrutiny of the proposed liquefied natural gas, LNG, terminal in Shannon and there is a lot of opposition to it. I understand some of the opposition because we are trying to decarbonise our economy and I completely appreciate some of the arguments. However, we have to live in the real world. In the real world, if anything was to happen to the gas supply in this country, we would be in serious trouble. We have only ten days supply in this country. Never mind industry, many people's homes in this country are heated by gas. We are speaking in this House today about home heating oil, many houses, particularly in the commuter belt in Kildare, Dublin, Meath and Wicklow, are heated by gas.

We have to be completely honest with the public. When we talk about energy security, it is not just home heating oil that we are dealing with in this circumstance, we need to be cognisant of all types of energy moving forward. That is why the LNG terminal in Shannon is crucial to the energy security of this country. God forbid if something was to happen to the gas pipeline between the UK and Ireland. We would be in serious trouble. We need to get real around what we are doing about our energy security.

We also need to look at the mix of the energy being used, particularly carbon-based energy. Biodiesel and hydrotreated vegetable oil, HVO, offer alternatives, particularly when we look at home heating because, by and large, it is kerosene. HVO and biodiesel can play a role in terms of the mix people are using at home. It is a little bit more expensive, and that is something

that has to be considered, particularly when a lot of hard-pressed families have to pay an increased cost for home heating oil.

HVO and biodiesel can, however, deliver fuel to this country that is sourced primarily within the European Union. When we look at what is happening in the Strait of Hormuz and Iran, for example, we are being impacted by global oil supply chains. If we can source far more of our energy in Europe, particularly our fuel, it will help with energy security into the future.

I have raised the question of nuclear time and again in this House with the Minister of State and the Minister, Deputy O'Brien. I have also raised it in other places such as the Joint Committee on Climate, Environment and Energy, which I sit on. Many people in the media and in this House have questioned how France, for example, has been able to keep its energy prices so low. The short answer is it is because it has nuclear. As soon as I have ever mentioned the word "nuclear", people literally go nuclear. They completely cut me off. We need to have an honest conversation. I have not called for us to go building huge nuclear plants in this country. I have asked for a reasoned debate and reasoned consideration by the Department and everyone in this House regarding the viability and the possibility of nuclear power in this country. I am not talking about huge nuclear power plants. I am talking about small modular reactors, SMRs. They are about the size of a house but when we compare that to large nuclear compounds throughout the world, they are quite small. This has been adopted by many countries in Europe and by Canada. It is seen as the way forward and the way to address most energy concerns. We are looking to electrify the vast majority of our lives with electric cars and all of the electrical devices in our homes.

Electricity and the generation of energy is already one of the biggest issues globally. We need to ensure our energy security. We are a small island. We have to import most of the stuff. We are doing a lot around renewable energy, particularly onshore wind, but we have a lot more to do with offshore wind energy. We need to open our minds and perspectives into how we can ensure that we have energy security moving forward. It is about having a mix. We want to decarbonise, and we are doing as much as we can to decarbonise but we should do a lot more. We have seen the success of Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI, and the retrofitting schemes. A lot of people come into my office in Celbridge and I meet people in clinics throughout Kildare. We are helping these people apply for SEAI grants. The grant schemes for windows and doors have been a great success, as has the wraparound grant scheme. It is about extending that. Older people have been able to avail of it with a bit of savings. I am always conscious of the people who do not have some savings there and the need to provide additional supports for them as well.

When we speak of vulnerable people in relation to the home heating oil situation, as well gas and energy security, it is crucial that in any future supports package, we look at a living alone allowance. When two older people live together, they have the ability to combine their pensions, whatever type of pension it is. It is far more difficult for an older person living on their own - their spouse may be deceased or they could be separated - to pay for a fill of oil or for their rising fuel costs.

It is crucial that we articulate that supports are there for people who are experiencing difficulties. What the Government is doing here is being reflective and being cognisant of the impact on people's day-to-day lives by reducing the cost of petrol and diesel and by ensuring that we have the flexibility and the bandwidth as things change - because things will change,

and there is a likelihood that things will get worse - to step in. We will have the financial mechanism and the ability to support the citizens of this State not just in the days and weeks ahead, but in the months and years ahead.

Deputy Mark Ward: I will start by giving my two cents, because 2 cent is all the Government believes people who use home heating oil are worth. A scabby cut of 2 cent on home heating oil is insulting. It will save a person €20 on a fill of a tank, a fill that now costs around €1,700. Not only is it scabby; it is also underhanded. Very soon, the greedy hands of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael will yank this measly 2 cent back off ordinary people by hiking up the carbon tax. They give with one hand and will take back with the other. It is smoke-and-mirror tactics.

The Government voted down Sinn Féin's proposals to completely remove the excise duty on home heating oil. This would have provided real, meaningful relief. Government measures are nowhere near good enough. Half measures avail us of nothing. Even before the conflict in the Middle East began, Ireland was top of the charts. We had the highest prices of petrol and diesel in Europe. We are top of the league. We had one of the highest prices of petrol and diesel in Europe, and we are top of the league in electricity and gas prices. This is a league nobody wants to be top of.

Last week, Sinn Féin gift-wrapped the Government the solution to bring down the cost of petrol and diesel. We handed it to the Government on a plate. It dithered while the prices at the pumps went up and up. Right when people needed the Government, it let them down. It allowed companies to price-gouge and increase prices at the pumps. What amazes me is how quickly garages can put up the prices of petrol and diesel. Straight away, up it goes. It also amazes me how slow they are to reduce them. They were not reduced this morning when I came into work. They were not down at all. This is on the watch of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

I will use my time to discuss the fuel allowance. The criteria have to be looked at. The extension does not go far enough, but the criteria for the fuel allowance need to be looked at. A number of people have contacted me recently in relation to fuel allowance, who, as a consequence of the housing crisis, are no longer eligible. Their adult children may have got an eviction notice and had to move back into the family home. Where their parents would have been previously eligible for fuel allowance, they are no longer eligible for that because a working adult has re-entered the home. That is something that needs to be looked at.

As I said already, gas and electricity prices have gone through the roof. The prices are, as I said, some of the highest in Europe. The Government, in its wisdom, decided to do away with the energy credits which would have helped hundreds of thousands of people across the State. There are 320,000 people at this very moment who cannot afford to keep up with their energy bills. Two thirds of people in this country have less than €5,000 in savings. Talking to the people whom I represent on a daily basis, that little nest egg they have of less than €5,000 has been eaten away. If something comes up with an unintended price, they are unable to deal with it, such as a medical bill. People have contacted me in relation to bills for their vets. They are unable to deal with the things that they would have been able to deal with over the last number of years. As I said, the Government should have done better, could have done better and decided not to do better.

Deputy Michael Collins: The fuel allowance gave a good rebate and relief to people who receive it. I will always acknowledge something that will yield some relief for people who are under serious pressure, but what went on yesterday leaves a lot to be desired. I spoke to Councillor Declan Geraghty. He has lorries and is one of our councillors in Galway. He told me that while the reductions in excise are welcome to everyone on white diesel and petrol, there is a clear difference between the IRHA and the private operators. Fuel companies, quarry operators, hardware companies, manufacturing companies, retailers, etc., that operate trucks for their own collections and deliveries have been left to one side. That does not require a haulage licence. They do not qualify for the rebate scheme. It is totally unfair and will also lead to an increase in costs for the consumer and will have untold consequences for those companies as sole traders. The many companies that use green diesel in the manufacturing of products have also been forgotten, namely, steel manufacturing, quarries, concrete manufacturing, building, groundworks and civil engineering companies, who are large users of green diesel. This is not good enough going forward, especially for housing and commercial development within our nation.

I have to call the Minister of State out on this one. The fishermen are very angry. He is Minister of State with responsibility for fisheries, so this is where he should have come in. They are calling me to tell me they have been forgotten also, on top of the farmers. I am not sure. There was a rebate with fuel for fisheries in Europe one time. I am not sure whether that is still available. The previous Government would not look at it because it was a green Government and they had this assumption in mind that you did not use fuel, which is a crazy assumption, but look. God help people who have that mindset. They are not living in the real world. We would all love to think that we could move into a different kind of world where we would not need fuel. We are nowhere near that in this country at this time.

We do not even have wind energy offshore, something I raised with the Taoiseach in 2022 during Leaders' Questions. I spoke about the Barryroe oil field and the chance that it should be explored and looked at. It was kind of shrugged off and laughed off as a joke. I mentioned in 2022 that we could face serious problems. We have and we are because we have no energy independence. We are depending on every country in the world to look after ourselves. We could well look after ourselves without any other country. We are surrounded by water. That is where wind energy comes into play.

We could have strong potential of an oil field off Barryroe. That was not researched, and when I spoke to the Taoiseach yesterday, he said von der Leyen told him not to do it. Von der Leyen is telling us how to run our country. We should be in collaboration with Europe by all means, but we certainly should not be dictated by Europe on how to get our fuel independence in this country. We should have explored the Barryroe field. We should have further explored the Kinsale field. We will throw all our resources out of this country and now we are totally dependent on fuel coming in from Scotland. God help us if anything goes wrong there, because that will close down the country within two weeks, maybe less. There are ways.

We saw what happened with the home heating. A lot of people are very angry about that. We are talking about the fuel allowance, but still 1.5 million people do not get fuel allowance. They are the squeezed middle. They are the people who get up early in the morning and work in this country to put bread and butter on our table, on the tables of their neighbours and the tables of this country. They have been forgotten. Someone said yesterday that the package the

Government put together is better than any package in the world. They are totally forgetting that the Government is robbing 65% taxes out of people's pockets every time they go to the filling station. The Government is taking the most tax in the world. It is easy to say it can give something a little extra back, but it has been forgotten that there may be a way to stop the charges from the toll bridge for a while. There are ways and means around facing the crisis we are in right now.

Let us be honest: public transport, where it is being delivered, is fine. For a number of routes in my own constituency, and I presume throughout the country, people have been told there is no more money in the NTA's purses. Routes that they tendered for in Clonakilty, Dunmanway, Timoleague and Grange six months ago have been pulled out. Imagine. Now they are told there is no money. We will just pass away the time now and call the Government again. People in Kealkill have no transport. Not one iota of transport service is passing their doors in Drinagh and Caheragh. I could keep talking for here forever. It is all right to talk about public transport, but it is not there.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this Bill. First, any reduction is welcome. I was looking for figures with regard to NORA. Between €2 billion and €3 billion was supposed to be paid into it since 2007 or 2008. My understanding is that the oil reserves are not just in Ireland, but we have a deal with someone else. The way NORA is set up needs more explanation, to be quite frank about it. The levy going is a good thing.

We welcome the reduction in the price of fuel for white diesel and petrol, but green diesel has totally been left behind. I remember the day myself, Deputy Collins and a few others went into government talks. When we brought up the carbon tax, we were told "No, it can't be touched; that's from Europe and that's it". I have got information from Europe on what is mandatory on all EU states. They must participate in the EU emissions trading system, ETS, which is an EU-wide system that puts a price on carbon for power plants, heavy industry and aviation. The Government decided not to go near aviation but instead to tax the person driving up and down the country. The ETS market works on a "cap and trade" basis. It is not a fixed tax. Every EU country must price carbon in these sectors. This is the only compulsory carbon-pricing mechanism in the EU. What is not mandatory is a national carbon tax. It is actually optional. If you can look at some of the different countries in Europe, you will see that in Sweden it is very high, whereas Germany basically has nothing. The Government has constantly said we have to do this because it is EU law, but there is no law to state that you cannot reduce the carbon tax. I ask if anyone can give me information contrary to that. We were led to believe that this was all a requirement of the EU. If we can bring in legislation today to basically get rid of the NORA levy, there is no reason we cannot do the same for the home heating sector and the agricultural and building sectors.

I spoke to a groundworks contractor in Dublin this morning who is working at houses. Every month, it is costing them €240,000 more now in diesel than a month ago. Is that sustainable? What is that going to do? It will put up the price of a house. Every one of the main suppliers has sent out messages saying that tar, concrete and all the materials are going up. House builders are deciding whether they need to pull back. Those are the facts of what is going on. If the Minister of State wants me to verify that, I will do so. If you go to a site, you will learn that it is €120 a day extra for the digger now in green diesel. You can multiply that by the number of plants that are on the site. Even a generator on a site is on green diesel.

When you are finished on the site, you have to go to the quarry to bring stones. The crusher, the loading shovel and every part of the quarry bar the lorry on the road will be on green diesel. These are the facts. We cannot see we are driving up the price of houses because we are leaving the price of green diesel at its current level. The excuse that was used about carbon tax was that we cannot stir it. I have looked for the full breakdown of the carbon tax receipts. It needs to be put on the record. Yes, agriculture gets some of this money. Those who talk about environmental schemes say that the money is going to AEOS and REPS, but the fact is that as much money, or more, was going to environmental schemes when there was no carbon tax as there is now. Those are the facts on that.

We heard about insulating houses and doing all of that. Everyone agrees with that but if we look at the figure to see what was spent, we will see that it was €450 million to €500 million. We are taking in €1.1 billion or €1.2 billion. We paid for everything else all down through the years before there was any carbon tax. What has been brought in is another tax like the USC. I am not saying that the Government should scrap it for good but I am asking that at least while people are under pressure, it should be dropped for a few months to try to give people breathing space. Green diesel is €1.61 today. I got the prices earlier. Kerosene is up there as well. That was being bought at 96 cent or 98 cent, including VAT. Those are the facts. The Government needs to have a real look at this.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: I do not think the Minister of State really understands how hard people are hurting at the moment or how disgusted citizens of this country are about the damage being done to their lives by the tax policies of this Government with regard to fuel. I do not think the Government has an iota of understanding. This is one of the most disconnected governments from the real existence of so many people I have seen. There is a chasm between the Minister of State's experience and that of teachers, nurses, doctors and gardaí working in this country. So many people are forced to work in Dublin, for a start. They cannot afford to live in Dublin because they cannot afford a house there. They are forced to live 40, 50 or 60 km away. Because of that, they are forced to pay massive prices for fuel to commute back and forth on a daily basis. Those individuals - the people who get up early in the morning and make this country work - are the ones who are now struggling. Two-income families are struggling to be able to make ends meet because of the policies of the Government.

Let us be honest about what is happening here. There is a view that the Government is a bystander when it comes to the fuel crisis in this country. This Government is the primary engine of inflation in fuel and its cost in this country at the moment. For sure there is a war, but there was a fuel crisis before the war even started. There were 320,000 people in energy arrears before the war even started. The Government was taking 60% to 65% of the cost of petrol and diesel out of people's pockets before the war even started. The Government has been robbing the people of this country in terms of fuel prices for many years and is looking to increase the price of fuel year-on-year.

The Taoiseach accused Aontú of being populist earlier because we are calling for a cut in carbon taxes. He does not get it. The Government just does not understand this. You cannot levy a tax on people for a product they cannot afford. There is a social contract when it comes to taxation. That is why we have progressive taxes. People pay taxes based on what they are able to pay but the Government is levying it on a staple - a product they cannot live without - at a rate they cannot pay. It is levying it as if it is a luxury good and its purchase is a form of

conspicuous purchasing. It is not. This is the difference between individuals being able to get to work, or not; businesses being able to function, or not; and farmers being able to produce food, or not. The Government is levying it at a rate where people cannot afford to pay it. I do not think the Government understands that. That is the key problem with its approach to this.

We have had an understanding on taxation for many years that we do not over-tax the staples of life, such as children's footwear and food. Now the Government is going down the road of purposely over-taxing these staples. One of the reasons it is doing so is because it is still imbued with the Green Party agenda of using a stick to get people out of private transport. It is as if the Greens have never left the Government at all. The ghosts of the Green Party are still determining the taxation policy on fuel. I suggest that if the Government wants to get people out of private transport, it should use a carrot rather than a stick. It should provide the public transport that hundreds of thousands of people are crying out for. It should help them to retrofit and get the solar panels on their roofs. People want to get out of fossil fuels - they are dying to do so - but they cannot because of the cost barrier.

I listened to Deputy Ó Cearúil on this matter. Most of the world has realised that you cannot keep taxing energy. Europe even realises that it has become flabby and competitive in the last 20 or 30 years *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world because it is putting so much taxation on energy at the moment. Europe has suffered economically significantly over the last ten years and is changing direction but this Government is the slowest government to change direction on this. He said the Government cannot step in every time prices are rising. The Government is in the middle of the fuel crisis. It took €4.1 billion out of the pockets of people in 2024 in fuel. Carbon tax, which did not exist ten years ago, is now topping €1 billion.

The Government's response to people who have seen the price of home heating oil double in the last four weeks is to give a 2 cent reduction in the NORA levy. That is astounding. It has gone from €1,000 up to €1,750 and the Government's response is to drop it by €20.

5 o'clock

In four weeks, it will introduce another carbon tax hike, which will wipe out that 2 cent. The Minister of State must realise that is an abomination. It is an insult. It is a disgusting response to a whole section of society. I am talking about people who do not get the fuel allowance. These are people who are too rich for the fuel allowance but too poor to survive this Government's tax policies.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: It is good to have a few extra minutes to talk about this. Obviously, this legislation is about the National Oil Reserves Agency 2 cent levy suspension. That makes it 22 cent in total on diesel, 17 cent in total on petrol and another 2 cent reduction on home heating oil. As I have said and others have said, it is simply not enough in the current crisis. I know it is a geopolitical issue, but geopolitics hits people very hard, especially the most vulnerable. We had calls earlier in the year for a €400 support for people with disabilities who face additional costs. Imagine how they are faring right now with this. The excise duty cuts are not going to make up for the fuel price increases. The most vulnerable in our society are going to be affected by it. We need to do more. In that context, I welcome the suspension of the NORA levy, but we need to do more on the excise duties in the short term. In the medium term, we have to move away from our addiction to fossil fuels. As I have said to the Tánaiste, the Taoiseach and now the Minister of State, it is happening way too slowly.

Looking to 2040 and 2050 is simply not sufficient. We should be treating it like a wartime situation and moving at a rapid pace. There are people in local authority houses who are crying out for insulation and proper air handling systems that will reduce their fuel costs. That could be done a lot faster than is happening. The types of grants out there are insufficient to encourage people to move away. We need to have more measures whereby if a person is going to save €800 in a year, those €800 savings could go to the cost of their retrofit, even if it is over a 30-year period. We have to be creative about this.

The bigger picture is the fact that our planet is warming at an exponential rate. We are going to face massive costs and massive increases in the costs of living if we do not something. Obviously, that is a collective global cost. While little old Ireland is *per capita* a high contributor, we are relatively small in the big picture, so we need to move at EU level. We also need to get the likes of Trump out of power, but that is up to the American people. We have to look at our climate measures. The most effective climate measure is a just transition by making sure that we have alternatives to importing fossil fuels and that people can heat their homes from home-grown production, be it from green hydrogen from excess electricity production, better insulated housing or public transport powered by hydrogen, electricity produced at home or biofuels.

I have said this 100 times and I will say it 100 times more. We have the potential to be a net exporter of energy rather than an importer of €6 billion plus, as we are. That is going to cut costs for our people. With the surpluses we have, we need to support people in the short term when they are getting these price hikes, but in the short to medium term, we need a massive investment in retrofitting and home-grown energy. It is too long to spread it out. We have to say that by 2035 we will double the volume of renewables and storage. We have to look at private wires. We have to look at grid improvements, but we are not. We are just doing little incremental bits, which is not enough in the context of the prices that people have to pay at home but also our long-term contribution to the sustainability of the planet.

We need to get real. I fully support measures, and I want to double the measures being introduced in the short term to help people. We have to start putting in the investment that will pay back in a very short period of time on the grid.

Deputy Brian Brennan: We are all deeply concerned about this escalating conflict and the scale of the damage we are witnessing. Now is the time to focus on de-escalation, and this can only be done through dialogue and diplomacy. Only yesterday, we learned that 23 sites of both gas and oil have been destroyed in Iran. These are sophisticated structures and will take time to be rebuilt. This will prolong the fuel crisis we are going through. No government can shield any country from this level of volatility. Therefore, I welcome the targeted measures that are being introduced in such unprecedented times. I note the value of these targeted measures of almost €250 million. I welcome the 22 cent reduction in the price of diesel and the 17 cent reduction in the price of petrol. The fuel allowance will be extended by four weeks. This will have a huge effect on pensioners, carers, people with disabilities and those of low incomes throughout Ireland. It will affect almost 400,000 households. I welcome the news that hauliers and bus companies will benefit from the diesel tax rebate scheme. I encourage the public to contact the CCPC if they are not satisfied that these reductions are being passed on.

We need to look at the agriculture sector. These measures are simply insufficient, especially for the hard-pressed tillage sector. The rising cost of fertiliser, up by over €200 per tonne, is also a major concern. It is as clear as night follows day that this will lead to food price inflation as farmers simply try to recoup their fuel price increase. Many experts estimate that this will lead to a 10% increase on the supermarket shelves.

If there is one thing that we have learned from this crisis, it is that we must expand our move to renewable energies. Our goal is 80% by 2030. This crisis highlights our dependence on imported fossil fuels. We simply need more renewables. We need to expand our capacity, protect our consumers from the volatile markets and accelerate our output of renewable energy. That will entail looking at our planning laws, which must have local consent, and we must also invest in the grid. I welcome the key initiatives that have been introduced to date, especially in relation to the SEAI grants for residential solar panels, heat pumps and intensive offshore wind developments. Ireland is hoping to have 5 GW of offshore energy by 2030. The benefits are clear in that we are going to have energy security. We are going to have reductions in emissions and there will be huge financial savings.

We have been here before with major crises through Brexit, Ukraine and Covid. We will get through this crisis by supporting those who need it most while remaining financially prudent, as we simply do not know how long this will last.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne: I certainly welcome the measures that have been brought forward, which are quite comprehensive and are targeted at the most vulnerable. I wish to highlight two issues that have been raised by others. One is the case of those who are involved in agriculture. Given the costs our farmers are facing, particularly with regard to fuel and the increasing cost of fertiliser, we need to find a package somewhat similar to that which we rightly found for those in the haulage sector and, indeed, in coach travel.

The other area related to heating that is an issue of concern is regarding schools. One of our challenges is that we pay the same level of capitation to all schools, but depending on the quality of the school building, the cost of heating it can be far more significant. If there is an old school building dating from the early years of the last century or even beforehand, often the costs of heating that are significantly more than is the case for some of the modern and well-insulated buildings, yet we continue to pay the same levels of capitation. A review on the capitation side is needed.

In the long run, we need to look at investing in renewables. We are still too reliant on imported fossil fuels in this country. Even in the case of energy coming into the country, far too much of it is imported. Last year, 17% of the energy used in Ireland came through the interconnectors. It was imported energy. That was up from 15% the previous year and up from 10% the year before that. I am very conscious of the multibillion euro investment in the grid, which is really needed. We need to move as quickly as possible on the private wires Bill, which colleagues have mentioned. We have to have a step change in our investment in renewables. At Cabinet level, there is the clearing house for offshore energy. However, we have to talk about what we are doing with regard to onshore wind and solar and how we can make sure we have a more transparent but expedited planning process in that regard.

Of course, we need to fund it. It is incredibly dishonest on the part of those who claim that they are in support of renewable energy while at the same time, they want to get rid of the

carbon tax. There are climate-sceptic parties in this House. They are entitled to hold that particular view but we know that climate change is real and that we need to address the challenge. We need to fund that investment in retrofitting and the move to green energy so it is critical, therefore, that we maintain the carbon tax to be able to fund that. That may be an unpopular thing to say but we are going to continue to experience some of these shocks. We have seen it following Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and we are seeing it in terms of what is happening at present in west Asia. Once we see any of these disruptions, those difficulties are going to be faced here in Ireland so we have to stand strong and explain exactly where the carbon tax is being spent. That said, the short-term measures that have been taken are the correct measures to provide support - people are hurting - but I do ask that additional consideration be given to those engaged in agriculture and the school community.

Deputy John McGuinness: I welcome the measures that have been introduced. They were timely and perhaps they could have been introduced earlier if we were agile enough as a State to turn around, identify where the problems are and then deal with them but, unfortunately, we are not. It signals that there is a clear dysfunction at the heart of administration in this country and that we do not plan for the future. I hope the measures are a first step because when we look at what was given to the hauliers, and I put on the record that my background is in transport, much more needs to be done and we have to be able to change what we have been doing very quickly if something else should happen to push prices up because the cost to hauliers will simply be passed on to the consumer. It ends up at the door of the consumer anyway. Similarly, farmers produce our food yet they did not get the type of support they should have got in this basket of supports. Again, if they do not get support with their costs, it ends up with the consumer or it ends up in the pocket of some of the bigger supermarkets all over the country. We all know this from previous experiences but we are not translating it properly into the type of financial support that is needed quickly and immediately.

I have my view on renewable energy and wind farms. I think we are destroying the countryside with them. Where are the regulations that were promised way back in 2016 or 2013? Where are they? We were told we would have them in the first quarter of this year but we do not have them. As long as that happens, the bigger companies push ahead with their agenda but the Government, which is responsible for the direction the country is taking, simply stands idly by and does not engage with this House here or with the communities that are affected in any sort of meaningful way.

I have great concern for the elderly, those living in poorly heated accommodation, young families and individuals living in substandard apartments who must fork out more and more money for the heating systems in their apartments and are not getting a direct support in these measures. In reviewing all of this because it will remain under review while the war continues and the uncertainty is there, I ask the Minister to look at and support those that we know need greater support than what was given to them today.

We should have a debate about nuclear options - about nuclear power and what is happening right across Europe. We are prepared to import it because it was produced that way but yet we are not prepared to examine it fully in terms of the State and how we should be preparing for the future.

The carbon tax is another example of being driven down a particular route to suit Europe. We have a war across many countries that is affecting the world and I would say that in wartime, we should be willing to look at every option that is central to the upkeep of the well-being and coffers of the State and be prepared to make the changes that are necessary to make the lives of people much better.

Reference was made to the retrofitting of homes. If somebody does not have the money to do it up front, it is a nightmare as far as red tape and bureaucracy are concerned. If somebody goes through the likes of SSE Airtricity and avails of its home inspection scheme, which costs €650, he or she will find that at the end of it, he or she will have a nice bit of paper but nothing else. What is being recommended is so expensive that there are many households that simply cannot afford it so let us look at those who do not have something and give it to them.

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin: If a driver pays €60 for petrol or diesel, this Government takes roughly €40 off that so before the crisis hit, Ireland had some of the highest fuel costs in all of Europe. The Government could have chosen to deliver the maximum excise cut possible on diesel and petrol and remove excise entirely from home heating oil but it chose not to do that. Instead it chose to short-change people basically - to give with one hand and take it back with the other. Four weeks into the crisis, it only acted after a lot of relentless pressure from Sinn Féin and a very angry public that is desperately crying out for support. We got a package of half measures that had to be dragged out of the Government.

I see commuters absolutely livid over this - travelling every day to from Wexford and Wicklow to Dublin and getting fleeced. We are talking about farmers getting fleeced while workers, drivers, bus operators and taxi drivers are still being hammered. Regarding home heating oil, the weather has taken a very cold turn today and sleet has been forecast. Two thirds of households in rural Ireland, including Wexford and Wicklow, rely on home heating oil to heat their houses but the Government even plans to increase the upcoming carbon tax. The price of a fill has doubled in a matter of weeks. A measly cut of €2 is basically an insult. We are talking about maybe a €20 reduction in a fill that can cost up to €1,700, which is a massive amount, so this is really a drop in the ocean compared with the surge in prices that workers and families are being forced to pay as well. The Government could have adopted Sinn Féin's proposal to completely remove excise on home heating oil because people are really struggling. We are talking about 320,000 people who are now saying that they cannot afford to pay their electricity bills. One in four people are saying they cannot afford to pay their gas bills. What the people need really are meaningful supports. I was contacted today by bus and coach operators-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin: I think I have another half minute.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy does not. Deputy Ó Murchú is up next.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I agree with Deputy John McGuinness, which is not the way I expected to start this speech. I agree with him that there has been a lack of flexibility and agility on the part of Government. I do not accept that enough has been done with regard to

the cuts to diesel and petrol. I do not think it is sufficient for those out there who are suffering. As little as that was, it would have been better if this had been introduced three weeks, two weeks or one week ago but we could not and we were waiting or the Government was assessing and people already were under severe pressure because of the cost-of-living crisis that is affecting many. If we're talking about particular cohorts that are under pressure, they include those with disabilities, who had €1,400 taken off them from one budget to another, so these are the sort of things that need to be dealt with. Again, I do not think enough has been done.

We do not know what is going to happen. Donald Trump may be negotiating with himself at present. He may intend to bring this to an end or he may intend to start some sort of invasion, and I cannot even imagine what other chaos that is going to bring. The Israelis are quite happy to continue bombing and causing destruction. Whether that is what they have done in Palestine or what they are doing at present in Lebanon or in the wider field of the Middle East, none of it is good.

This Government had one job, and that was to look after the people in Ireland who are suffering. We have all spoken about coach operators. We have spoken about those in agriculture. We have also spoken today about community nurses that are under pressure. This is not going to be enough to facilitate them doing the work they do. The same goes with home carers. None of it is good enough.

Carbon tax is also about dissuasion and that does not matter if you have alternatives. The fact is the Government is taking away as it gives.

Deputy Barry Heneghan: The Bill is about security and I am blue in the face screaming and asking for quick changes to this.

I also concur with Deputy Byrne about the possibility of using nuclear power, particularly for its efficiency. I propose that we put it in his constituency, because the problem with most issues in this country is the Nimbyism. No one wants it in their own constituency, even though it would benefit the Irish people.

I also concur that we are importing from France and we are going to make ourselves more dependent. I have said before and will say again that during the world war Churchill tried to limit the amount of coal coming to Ireland to force Dev's hand and end our neutrality and one of the worst things a country can be is energy dependent and to not have security of supply and security of infrastructure. Ultimately, this is the truth for the Irish people and for Irish businesses. We have seen that in the past few days.

We are debating oil reserves. We are continuously discussing the LNG terminal proposal at the climate and energy committee. We saw, in 24 hours, a sharp rise of nearly 23% in the global cost of LNG. Does this show that this proposal to add energy security is not doing that at all? Would we be putting it into a decentralised grid? If adding one more point of failure to add energy security is what we are proposing, adding multiple points of failure is what we should be doing. Let us consider what the Germans are doing. They are moving from a petrostate to an electrostate. This is happening across Europe but it seems that we are not acting fast enough.

I welcome some of the work that ESB and EirGrid have been doing and I welcome that there was a huge amount of work done on the system before they started. There are amazing engineers working there who I have met. It is just not happening fast enough. The

Government's proposed private wires Bill will speed up the process and I hope that my Bill will get drafted before it passes.

I mentioned the Laffan facility, one of the most important LNG hubs, previously and how it has driven up the price across the globe. Through higher bills, higher costs for businesses and a loss in competitiveness, we are importing the vast majority of our energy. However, if other European countries had the potential that we have on our seabed, with offshore renewable energy, ORE, and with wind, they would be grabbing it and supplying it. They would be a producer of green hydrogen. They would use gravity storage. They would be use everything and benefit their people as much as possible.

What happened to the majority of our oil and gas? We gave it to a foreign country to benefit their people. There are people in these countries who were benefiting from Irish oil and gas.

We still are not building quick enough. I welcome some of the developments from ESB in respect of ORE but it is not being done fast enough. Ireland is reliant on foreign direct investment, FDI, and if it leaves us exposed, it is not good. We cannot build an energy system based on dependence.

At a meeting of the climate and energy committee earlier, I was reading the recent data comparing energy prices across Europe. We had representatives of Engineering Ireland before us. It was a great discussion. The other Deputies and the Senators on the committee were talking about the cheaper countries, Sweden and Finland, and the most expensive, the UK, but who is coming in near second only Ireland? The conclusion is unavoidable. If that gap continues, business people are the people who are struggling but we can protect them.

As I always say, I do not like to come in here and give out; I like to offer a few solutions. We all know there have been some changes to port marshalling where now we can invest in ports. I, again, welcome the investment in Cork Port that has allowed for possible more ORE to be developed but I know from replies to my recent parliamentary questions that other ports are being examined. This needs to be done. Belfast has a backlog of free bookings for its ORE for another country. Why cannot we have more ports that can develop ORE?

Onshore wind facilities are much easier to build but it is not as efficient. It has a longer lifespan, though.

We are still in many ways a petrostate. We are dependent on imported fossil fuels. Now we were going to be spending close to €1 billion on energy security, which will last us how many days if we did lose connection? It is one more point of failure.

What we need is private wires, of course, but also a simpler system that gives the regulator, the CRU, the authority to approve projects whether they make sense without the unnecessary barriers or certain exemptions, because we see how that happens. We need a single regulator as the decision maker. We have seen it across planning, for example. When there are too many people making decisions not in parallel but systematically, it delays everything. If we put one person in charge of this decision-making for our energy system, it will benefit the Irish people.

It is all about resilience. We are saying that, whether it is invested in our long duration energy storage so we stop wasting renewable energy - millions of euro is being lost by solar farms and wind farms when there is too much sun and too much energy - the acceleration of our offshore wind, which I have spoken about, marine energy or green hydrogen, which we

could speak about. Professor James Carton, my old engineering professor, has spoken to the Department about this. He might have persuaded me while he was teaching me in college to be pro-green hydrogen.

I spoke about the delivery of port infrastructure and, crucially, the decentralisation of energy production.

Another issue that we have constantly referred to, and other Deputies have mentioned in the debate, is a very quick solution. People in apartment dwellings who do not have access due to a management company owning their apartment building cannot build their own solar systems. A plug-in solar system scheme implemented by the German Government has had a brilliant uptake, so much so that it is doing it again. When I asked why plug-in solar was not allowed in Ireland, I was told by the Department that there was a consultation done in 2024. I have asked who gave the bad reviews, because I presume that it is solar installers who do not want someone to be able to plug in a system in their apartments. In north Dublin, I represent people who are financially struggling and living in apartments who would love to lower their energy bills. This is a quick simple fix that needs only a regulation change that we can provide. Constituents have been crying out for it since I have been in here, for instance, renters and single mothers who are struggling at the moment who can lower their bills. Plug-in solar is a clear option. If it was not safe - one of the answers I got back from the Department was that due to EU regulations it cannot be done - how are the Germans doing it? It is low cost, it is scalable and it empowers people. That is the best part. We are still behind and if we are serious about energy independence and reducing people's bills, it is a quick fix.

Another issue we need to discuss is how we are still relying heavily on gas. I understand, and think it is funny, when people say, "the energy transition". It is more like the energy demolition and rebuild, because the changes that we need in the State to be energy independent are going to be huge.

I welcome the investment that the Government has committed to ESB, but the speed at which things are being done is the reason the private wires Bill is being proposed and why we are missing out on investment opportunities. Foreign multinationals, when they are coming to Ireland, cannot believe the delays in building small-scale infrastructure for renewables to power high energy users, industrial users or someone who requires energy. The problem is we are within a system where expensive gas is setting the price of electricity even when most of the power generated is far cheaper and we need separate low-cost renewables from the expensive fossil backup and we need to expand long-term contracts, which was mentioned at the committee, and reward storage and flexibility.

It would allow consumers to benefit from cheap electricity when the price changes. We should not have a fixed price, but we should also not be averaging low-cost energy into permanently high bills. The Irish people should benefit when the Irish system built by us is producing energy. We also need to rethink the grid and building more infrastructure.

I have to let Deputy Danny Healy-Rae in. I wish to conclude by saying this Bill matters, but it is only part of the answer. The real challenge is bigger. It is about moving out of dependence and into independence. I welcome the development of the Minister, Deputy Chambers' critical infrastructure Bill. I hope Government will use that to benefit the Irish

people and to make a change as fast as possible. I have given the Minister of State one solution about plug-in solar, and I would love to see that implemented.

We can go back to private wires and long duration energy storage another time.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak again on this very important and emotive subject. While I thank the Government for the positive elements with the increases and the help it is giving to some of the haulage industry, a great portion of hauliers will not benefit from the tax rebate because they do not have a haulage licence. Even the live exporter members who were in our committee a while ago will not benefit from the rebate. They will benefit, of course, from the reduction at the pump, and I asked for that here last Wednesday. The people who are paying at the pump should benefit at the pump.

We are told the Government is benefiting by almost €40 million extra each week since the price went up. For the next ten weeks, the extent of what is being spent is around €25 million a week. Of course, we welcome whatever we are getting but the talk on the phone today, and every Deputy's phone is busy, but mine is exceptionally busy today because of the number of people with tractors who are up in arms and who are saying they are going to do this and that and that they will have to be heard. Three cent, when the price of diesel has been increased by 70 cent, is not sufficient and is not good enough. The people with kerosene or home heating oil are also very hurt by this. Two cent a litre for them is not enough either.

I spoke twice last night but I am here tonight to ask Government to go back and if there is no way to give a reduction, it must give a subsidy. The Government must do something for these people. We were able to do it for the Ukrainians and for many other things but we have to do this for our own farmers who are producing food. Some of them are small farms and some of them are big enterprises, but they are all paying a massive sum now for diesel. It was 98 cent per litre before the bombs and now it is €1.68. There is no change in that.

One fellow told me he had ten tractors and he is a contractor. When he fills them in the morning, it cost €6,500 for one day. That is the extent and amount as they are tractors to do big work. The Minister of State will know, as Clare is no different to Kerry, that since Christmas and before it, no farmer could go outside the gap to spread slurry or to do anything. Most of it is there to be done now, and many fellows are wondering whether they will bother planting the grain now. I ask the Government to get together to come up with some formula for next week. It is more important than anything else to ensure this important sector of our community.

There are many industrialists coming and going, and we wish them all the best, but every farmer tends to stay where he is. None of them is going to emigrate and they are not thinking of doing anything else. If they start their farm and get stuck in, they generally finish up. They were proud to get the places they inherited from their parents or grandparents or whatever but they want to hand it back in the same fashion or better than they got it. They want to hand it down to their sons and daughters but they are having trouble with that because of generational renewal problems at present. Many young fellows are now asking why should they be working the weekend when all the fellows they went to college with - because all these farmers' sons and daughters went to college - and all their friends are not working the weekends. When they see something like this happening with fellows going around with their caps in their hands and who do not know what they are going to do, how they are going to continue or pay the oil man,

people will stop up. I ask the Government not to let this go farther than next week and to do something positive together to help these people.

Some people are saying that because there was no excise on green diesel, they will not get it back. We must give them a subsidy; there is a way around it. There is now 70 cent of a difference since they were working away and farmers were under pressure enough to keep going with all the rules and regulations they have at the present time. The price of diesel was dear enough before it went to that and before it finished up at that price. It was only 39 cent per litre back in 2020, which was a short five years ago. They are worried now that this will be the same, where they could finish up at €1.40 or €1.50, and it will not work that way. I am not fighting. I have no gripe in the world, personal or otherwise, with the Minister of State but I am explaining it to him here and to tell the Government clearly that this cannot continue without being addressed. The cut of 3 cent was a proper insult, as well as the 2 cent cut to the home heating oil. Not everyone is getting the fuel allowance as many people who should get it are not getting it for one reason or another. The home heating oil is all they have.

As I have said to the Minister of State previously, the cost of electricity has gone up day by day since the day Bord na Móna was scrapped. We have no control in the world; we have no regulator. There are different ESB companies that are charging different amounts and putting it up by so many percent, and others are bringing it down. There is no law and order with these ESB providers and the regulator must be brought to task. I do not know whether it was by design or whatever but on what I will call the day before last night, all the pumps jumped to €2.28. It is not only one or two here and there, but it is every pump along the road that went to €2.28 and I am worried about that. Did this happen to the Minister of State on his journey here? That is what I have seen. That is very unfair if what I think has happened is happening.

I appeal to the Minister of State. We are trying to work together here for the benefit of the country but a whole lot of people are very dissatisfied with what came out of here last night. I ask the Minister of State to address it next week and as soon as possible. If the Government cannot refund or take money off it, it must give them a direct subsidy towards it whereby when they show you a receipt, they will get so much back. I appeal to and urge the Government to do that, on behalf of the farmers and the tractor men all over the country. On another small thing they do, which is not a small thing really, last Sunday, about 50 tractors landed into the sports field in Barraduff to fundraise for the cancer link bus from Kerry to Cork. They do all that kind of fundraising out of their own pockets. We would not have the cancer link bus if it were not for those fundraising efforts, which mean so much to people who get sick in Kerry.

The Government should think of that in its deliberations. That is happening Sunday after Sunday, week in, week out. The Government should think of what that means in real terms to real people who are sick.

My main focus when coming up here last week was to look for help for hauliers and tractor men. That is the greatest demand I have today. I will be back again next week, asking the same things. I appeal to the Government to work to do something about the price of green diesel and to lower the price of heating oil. It has to be done, one way or another.

Minister of State at the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment (Deputy Timmy Dooley): I appreciate the contributions of all who spoke in the debate today, some down standard political lines, but others fully understanding and cognisant of where the Irish

economy and the various sectors are at. They are really negatively impacted by the massive disruption to the supply of oil from the Middle East to the Irish economy.

At the outset, I thank Deputy Danny Healy-Rae for his comments. I know where he is coming from. As the Minister of State with responsibility for the fishing sector, I know there is no immediate solution because the oil that is used does not carry the same taxes as petrol and diesel at the pumps, so there is a difficulty. I take the Deputy's point with regard to the subsidy. The difficulty with subsidies is that they have to be paid for from somewhere else, and it is a challenge to try to burden some other sector of society. It is a transfer, effectively, or a tax that would have to be raised elsewhere, so that is a challenge.

What the Government did this week was to look at the tax model through the excise. I know that some have sought to represent that as being mean or not being an appropriate response, but it was the only response that could have been taken, unless we were to start looking at raising taxes elsewhere. Others have sought to undermine the carbon tax. In fairness, Deputy Healy-Rae did not go down that road.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am against that as well.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I accept that. The reality is that the carbon tax funds significant investment in reducing aspects of our economic dependence on fossil fuels.

Some Deputies talked about a weakness in the SEAI grants scheme. We have brought forward simplification measures, which I am sure we will get to in due course. We are bringing in a grant scheme for windows and doors to help people to upgrade the energy efficiency of their homes, so their dependence on fossil fuels is thwarted in the best possible way. We have to continue that, notwithstanding the price shock that is there at the moment. It is the appropriate way. There are good grants for wall and attic insulation, and increased grants for heat pumps. We have to drive that ahead. The funding for that comes from the carbon tax.

I sat on the committee. I managed to get the party that I represent, from an Opposition perspective at the time, to support the introduction of the carbon tax. There was a political challenge, frankly, but the members of the party bravely took the decision at the time. We did not suffer electorally for it because the public actually wanted to hear how we take difficult decisions. It is not always possible for the Government to rectify issues that are from a different source. This shock to the oil system comes from outside our shores. It is beyond our control. Yes, we can reduce certain excise duties or try to assist people who are in greatest need in a targeted way, but that comes at a significant cost.

Nearly everybody had an ask this evening. I respect and understand that, because my phone rings too, my office is busy and we hear the concerns of people. However, it is beyond the capacity of the Exchequer to resolve every aspect or facet of this. We hear how the European Union intends to address the consequential rise in interest rates. They will rise as a result of this, inflationary pressures will increase and it will have an impact on food stocks. There has been a kind of knee-jerk reaction by some to immediately get in and address the price increase on fuel alone, but there will be other consequential impacts that will have reverberations throughout the economy. The Government cannot carry all of that. The only way to do that is to raise taxes elsewhere, which will further add to the burden. We have to be careful. With

any measure that we bring forward, we have to be able to sustain it. All of us in the House, regardless of which side we are on, know that there is no clarity as of today on where this ends. We would like to hope that this issue will come to a head shortly, that the Strait of Hormuz will be opened up and that oil and gas will start to move around again. However, there are backlogs in the system, refineries have been taken out and the entire supply chain has been disrupted, so there is a significant way to go.

Others sought to have the standard go at the data centres and said they only create a small amount of money. Data centres create a very significant reduction in the use of energy, when we see, in a co-located environment, the racks that would ordinarily sit in offices or other buildings dotted around the country. That consolidation leads to an energy reduction. Some on the hard left seek to set that at naught.

I want to pick out Deputy Gogarty, who, in fairness, is on the message here. Carbon taxes are about reducing our dependence on fossil fuels, and we have to move ahead with them.

Deputy Whitmore had a concern that the funding that comes from NORA and is used for significant other investment streams would, somehow, be lost as a result of this. NORA is significantly well funded and has the capacity to meet all its demands in that regard. The Deputy talked about bringing forward amendments because she felt that, somehow, the reduction of moneys going to NORA would go on for 18 months. That is not the case. My understanding is that the provision in the legislation gives the Minister the flexibility to retain this in exceptional circumstances, if there is sufficient necessity, but it is just for the initial period of time, as set out. However, rather than having to go back to primary legislation in the event of any further uncertainty, this provision is there. My feeling is that the Government is aligned with Deputy Whitmore, but rather than having to burden the House again, flexibility is created there.

As the Deputies are clearly aware, the Strait of Hormuz is a key transit route for approximately 20% of global oil supply, but this has effectively been closed since 20 March. That is the cause of all of this. Together, we have a responsibility to the economy as a whole to try to hold our trajectory.

I know that people have identified that this is the transport sector versus the tractor men, as Deputy Healy-Rae would have said. We support farmers in so many different ways. However, by also supporting the haulage sector, we are supporting employment and supporting the capacity of our productive sector to get goods to the market. I know that farmers and fishermen will rightly make the same claim, and we will have to look at that in due course.

With regard to home heating oil, again, because it does not carry the same taxation model, it is not possible to adjust it in the way that was done for petrol and diesel. However, we have looked at targeting the most vulnerable by a further month's extension of the fuel allowance. That is significant, particularly at a time of year, May, when we would hope the weather has improved, and there is not the same dependence on oil or gas to heat the home.

We have tried to bring a proportionate response. We are trying to be responsible with taxpayers' money. When anybody is looking for more money to be spent here, it is taxpayers' money and money that has already been allocated in the budget. Some political parties have the stock answer that there is a surplus. Multiples of that surplus get spent on a daily basis here and we must be careful about that.

We have to continue with the transition away from fossil fuels. The Leas-Cheann Comhairle indicated a desire to look at nuclear reactors. That may or may not be something the Government will look at. I have my worries about it. In my constituency it is a phenomenal challenge to get a wind farm built. There is a lot of push-back. I regularly ask constituents if they would take a nuclear reactor instead. I have to say the response is not all that positive. Maybe it is different in Kilkenny, or is it Carlow the Leas-Cheann Comhairle has in mind? In all seriousness, we have to respond appropriately, with compassion and in a way that is sustainable. We also have to show, as a Government, flexibility to the vagaries of what is going on in the Middle East.

Question put and agreed to.

Message from Select Committee

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport has completed its consideration of the following Revised Estimate for Public Services for the service of the year ending 31 December 2026: Vote 33.

Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 (Section 4(2)) (Scheme Termination Date) Order 2026: Motion

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Colm Brophy): I move:

That Dáil Éireann approves the following Order in draft:

Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 (Section 4(2)) (Scheme Termination Date) Order 2026,

a copy of which was laid in draft form before Dáil Éireann on 23rd February, 2026.

I thank the Members of Dáil Éireann for making time today to discuss this motion concerning the order the Minister, Deputy Jim O'Callaghan, and I propose to make. The motion is to extend the termination date of the financial contribution scheme for hosts of temporary protection beneficiaries from Ukraine, known as the accommodation recognition payment, ARP, scheme. The extension of the scheme is the only item for consideration today.

The ARP scheme was introduced at the outset of the greatest crisis in Europe since the Second World War, which has seen 125,000 people from Ukraine seek temporary protection in Ireland. Sole reliance on accommodation procured from the hospitality sector was not a sustainable response to the needs of those seeking accommodation. Thousands of Irish households generously offered shelter, safety and warmth to those fleeing conflict in Ukraine. The ARP scheme was introduced in July 2022 to recognise the valued contribution of those who opened their homes to provide shelter to people seeking temporary protection in Ireland. It involves a tax-free monthly payment of €600 per property used to accommodate beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine, irrespective of whether the property is vacant or shared with the host. The scheme's monthly rate is not linked to the costs incurred by the person

providing accommodation. It is merely intended to recognise the valuable contribution of those who host. It should be noted that the ARP scheme does not apply where there is a rental agreement in place and is not intended to substitute for rent.

When the ARP scheme was introduced, the monthly payment rate was set at €400 per property. The rate was subsequently increased to €800 from 1 December 2022 to coincide with the introduction of the offer-a-home scheme. The offer-a-home scheme is administered by local authorities in conjunction with the Local Government Management Agency and has been invaluable in making mainly holiday homes available as accommodation for beneficiaries of temporary protection. As we have moved from a crisis response, we have had to consider and taper our supports. As a result, the monthly payment rate was reduced from €800 to €600 in June 2025. This policy change was intended to mitigate the scheme's perceived impact on the private rental market. The ARP scheme is due to end on 31 March 2026. However, it is intended to extend the scheme by ministerial order to 31 March 2027, subject to Oireachtas approval. This would mirror the extension of the application of the temporary protection directive to the war in Ukraine. It will also provide certainty to hosts and to those accommodated in hosted arrangements.

This scheme is not only a means of recognising the part played by hosts, but has also been instrumental in supporting Ukrainians to integrate within local communities nationwide. It has been pivotal in diverting Ukrainian individuals and families away from State-contracted accommodation, which is often in hotels and guesthouses, allowing these beds to be returned to the hospitality sector. The scheme is also far more cost-effective for the Exchequer. The average cost of the ARP per person per night is €11, compared to €50 per night in commercial contracted accommodation. The scheme has allowed the Department to move away from a total reliance on tourism and hospitality settings. This has enabled the Department to consolidate its contracted accommodation portfolios. As the number in hosted accommodation has increased, the number in State-contracted accommodation has fallen from a high of almost 60,000 at the end of 2023 to under 20,000 at present. Since quarter 4 of 2024, the number of beneficiaries in hosted accommodation has exceeded those in contracted accommodation and continues to do so. To date, approximately €438 million has been paid to almost 28,000 recipients in respect of hosting over 64,000 temporary protection beneficiaries. Currently, some 42,000 Ukrainian citizens are being accommodated in more than 23,500 properties with the support of the scheme.

I acknowledge the concerns previously expressed in this House about the potential impact of the ARP scheme on the private rental market. I recognise that it could be the case, particularly in some rural areas, that €600 a month tax-free may be more beneficial to an owner than making the property available on the rental market. However, a survey from the Irish Red Cross found that the vast majority of hosts, 91%, are not landlords and have no plan to become landlords. For many, the primary motivation has been solidarity with Ukraine. Rather than interfering with the rental market, the ARP scheme has been, I believe, responsible for introducing a stream of accommodation that would not otherwise have been available. That is a view expressed by a number of support organisations in submissions to the Department regarding an extension to the scheme.

I reiterate that the payment is not a rent subsidy and is not available where there is a rental arrangement in place. However, I am aware of Deputies' concerns regarding the scheme's

potential impact on the private rental market, and steps have already been taken to address this. The Residential Tenancies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2026, brought forward by my colleague, the Minister, Deputy Browne, was recently enacted. Part 3 of this Act introduces changes to the eligibility criteria for the ARP scheme which are intended to safeguard rental properties for tenants. From 3 March 2026, properties that were registered with the Residential Tenancies Board at any time since 4 March 2022 will no longer qualify for the ARP scheme. Tenants will also no longer be eligible to apply for the scheme. This legislative change is intended to mitigate any impact the scheme may have on the private rental market. Should the scheme be extended, it is our intention to plan for a phased and orderly exit from the scheme.

As I indicated in this Chamber last week, and subject to agreement at Government level, it is our intention to reduce the monthly payment rate to €400 later this year, returning it to its original rate. This should enable an orderly and gradual winding-down of the scheme with due regard to all those involved. Further steps will be considered in due course to ensure an orderly exit. More broadly, I can confirm that planning for the conclusion of temporary protection is actively under way.

6 o'clock

That work is being advanced by the senior officials group reporting to the Cabinet committee on justice, migration and social affairs. In addition to extending the directive, member states are considering measures for a co-ordinated transition out of temporary protection when the directive is no longer in force. Department officials are considering proposals made by the European Commission on these matters.

While the ARP scheme is not without issues, an extension is required. Otherwise, it would risk placing significant pressures on an already strained private rental market. The potential loss of hosted accommodation risks displacing Ukrainian citizens, many of whom would be forced to compete in the private rental market or face precarious living conditions. Part 2 of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 introduced the scheme with a termination date of 31 March 2023. That date reflected the duration of temporary protection under the 2001 Council directive. The directive has subsequently been extended a number of times and, each time, the ARP scheme has been extended to mirror those extensions. In a continued spirit of unity and support for Ukraine and its citizens, the European Commission has extended temporary protection until March 2027.

It is therefore appropriate to make an order to extend the ARP scheme to the end of March 2027. Section 4(2) of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 allows us to make such a change to a date considered appropriate following consultation with the Ministers for Social Protection and public expenditure and reform. The Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, and I have undertaken those consultations and both those Ministers have expressed their support for the scheme's extension. In considering that extension, I was mindful of the need to continue to make provision for a financial contribution to assist in maintaining the availability of accommodation for beneficiaries of temporary protection. I want to be clear that the motion relates only to the extension of the scheme for a further year and nothing else.

The 2022 Act requires a draft order to be laid before and approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas. Approval of the motion before Dáil Éireann today is essential to ensure the continuation of the scheme beyond March 2026. Should the scheme's extension be approved

by the Oireachtas, we will continue to monitor it to ensure it remains fit for purpose and to allow for an orderly wind-down of the scheme to commence.

I take this opportunity to thank all those who have been involved in hosting. They have done more than provide a room; they have provided a sense of belonging. I acknowledge the great work of the Irish Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration and the local authorities and other organisations that have supported hosting arrangements. I also recognise the great work done by local communities in how they have actively supported families to integrate through access to employment and education. The scheme has been a very effective instrument of public policy that we cannot afford to abruptly lose. Approval of this motion will provide certainty to all involved in hosting arrangements.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I move amendment No. 1:

To insert the following after "23rd February, 2026":

", provided that this Order shall take effect only after the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 has been amended to provide for the Accommodation Recognition Payment (ARP) scheme termination date to be extended, only for the following:

- existing recipients, with respect to the beneficiaries of temporary protection currently benefitting from the scheme, where those beneficiaries of temporary protection have satisfied a means test, similar to those applicable for other housing assistance payments;
- new applications, who propose to host a beneficiary of temporary protection in their property, which is also their own primary residence, and who have not availed of the Rent-a-Room Relief scheme in the previous 24 months, ensuring that the ARP does not further distort the rental sector; and
- recipients who are not in receipt of any additional or 'top-up' payments from a beneficiary of temporary protection."

The accommodation recognition payment was originally introduced in July 2022 at a rate of €400 per month, tax free, in the months following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It was designed as an emergency measure to support those who opened their homes to provide accommodation to beneficiaries of temporary protection arriving in Ireland. Sinn Féin has commended, and I commend again, all those who opened rooms in their houses to accommodate people fleeing war.

Since then, however, the scheme has morphed into something entirely different. It has impacted on rents in the private rental sector and has enabled landlords to evade their usual tenancy obligations while getting a tax-free payment of, at some points, up to €800 per month, plus top-ups. The rate, which had been increased to €800 in September 2022, was reduced to €600 in the middle of last year. Now the Government is talking about changing it again.

The ARP provides a non-means-tested housing support to Ukrainians that is not available to anyone else in need of housing. That is unfair because those who receive this support could be in well-paid employment and may be working alongside others who receive no housing supports but might need them. Repeated warnings about the impact and unfairness of the ARP were ignored, and that is a real problem. The Government failed to listen and to act. The

Minister of State is being entirely disingenuous in citing a survey he knows no landlord would complete. Any measures the Government has taken to address potential impacts have been too little and too late.

We know that because a report published by the Department of housing tells us so. The report states that the payment "still represents a substantial incentive to divert properties from the private rental sector to the ARP scheme". The report points out that the tax-free nature of the ARP means it is more attractive than rental returns in some parts of the country, including the maximum levels of the housing assistance payment available to some households nationally. I could have written the report myself because it says exactly what Sinn Féin has been saying. Ministers have serious questions to answer about their failure to be honest with the Dáil about the impact of the ARP. Opposition parties that have taken the Government at its word should also reflect on their position. This scheme should not be extended without the significant amendments Sinn Féin has proposed.

To recap, the accommodation recognition payment was introduced as a payment for people who housed Ukrainians in their own homes after the Russian invasion. However, it has morphed into something very different. It is uniquely a tax-free payment to landlords who can then get top-up payments that are completely unregulated. Uniquely, the landlord is completely exempt from all the rules that would apply for any other tenant. It is a landlord's charter. It is not surprising that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael came up with it but it is surprising that other Opposition parties have backed them all the way. Uniquely as well, those who are accommodated under this scheme are not means-tested. There are precisely zero other housing supports from which families can benefit regardless of their income or wealth. The fact the payment is available to Ukrainians and nobody else means it is exactly the type of policy that leads to resentment and division. Again, it is hard to understand how it has had such support among members of parties on both sides of this Chamber.

The ARP distorts the rental sector. Sinn Féin has stated this time and again and the Government has dismissed us time and again. Indeed, Opposition party Members have stood in this Chamber and accused Sinn Féin of all sorts simply for stating what is now an absolute fact. The amendments we put forward that would have addressed that problem have been rejected time and again. All the while, the numbers of properties in the ARP scheme continued to grow, with an increase of 5,000 properties last year alone. Now we have confirmation of what we have been saying all along by way of an explicit confirmation in a Government report. It states categorically that the ARP scheme is having a negative impact on the private rental sector, yet the Government's answer is to extend it for another year. It is absolutely crazy stuff.

Once again, Sinn Féin is moving an amendment that would resolve the deficiencies in this scheme. There is an opportunity this evening for every Member of this House to let the public know whether lessons have actually been learned.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I commend Deputy Carthy on the amendments he has tabled and his steadfast challenging of this scheme, which is deeply unfair. The amendment he has tabled today would remove that unfairness. The scheme should not be extended without the amendment being accepted. For more than two years, we in Sinn Féin have been raising concerns about the accommodation recognition payment. It was brought in, as Deputy Carthy outlined, as an emergency measure following the brutal invasion of Ukraine. It was about

supporting people to host Ukrainians in their own homes, which Sinn Féin supported. That happened throughout the State, including in my constituency of Donegal.

However, it morphed into something completely different and we have been telling the Government that for two years. We have been saying it is having a serious impact on the private rental sector. We have been telling the Government the scheme is unfair in the way it has been framed. It is unfair for five different reasons, First, it is only available to Ukrainians. Second, it is the only situation wherein the State pays a tenant's full rent. Third, no means test is applied to the individuals for whom the State pays rent. Fourth, landlords in the scheme receive a tax-free payment. Fifth, landlords have no obligations whatsoever in relation to the Residential Tenancies Board, RTB, or tenants' rights. These incentives are why the scheme has exploded in the two years during which we have been raising these issues.

Despite the concerns we have raised time and again, the Government has persisted in extending the scheme and it is doing the same again today. Since I stood up here two years ago and warned that the extension of the scheme should not go ahead without our amendments, I have seen the impact of it in my county of Donegal. It is a county that is under huge pressure in terms of accommodation.

It is a county with so many houses with defective blocks, it is really hard to find a place to rent. The number of properties hosting Ukrainians has gone from 608 to 2,159 - one in ten such properties in the State are in Donegal. How can the Minister stand up there with a straight face and say that this is not impacting the private rental sector in that county? I do not need him to tell me that because we have been saying it for two years. The Government has hidden the evidence from the RTB report on the effects of the ARP. It was buried and was denied under freedom of information, but now we have it in black and white stating that this scheme is having a negative impact on the private rental sector. It is an incentive to divert properties from the rental sector to the ARP. It is deeply unfair.

The amendments that Deputy Carthy has tabled will remove the unfairness from it. The Government should not be extending this scheme, which embeds that unfairness. I challenge the Opposition parties to call out this unfairness. Of course, we need to support Ukrainians but it should not be in this way, which seriously impacts the private rental sector. We would not stand for it in any other situation and we should not stand for it here. The amendments are sensible and should be supported by the House.

Deputy Alan Kelly: Following the brutal invasion of Ukraine by Putin and Russia, I was proud of our country and the way we reacted. There has been a change of narrative since then and it is something we should all reflect on. Obviously, there is still a brutal war going on but on top of that, we need to be reflective, as a country and as a people, of both the huge contribution we have made to help Ukrainian people and the need for us to continue to support them in a way that is accommodating and compassionate.

I have to wonder about some of the commentary that I hear across various different political classes in relation to this. It is all very well saying that they will support Ukrainian people and that they support those of us who oppose the brutal war but actions speak louder than words. Nothing is ever perfect and we have to react to a war like this in a certain way and tailor the measures we bring in. The reality is that we make mistakes but we also learn from them. At its core, what we do has to be based in compassion and has to recognise that our contribution

to support them is in that fashion, rather than through any form of military support. Obviously, we are not in NATO or any military alliances and obviously we have not contributed in any way from a force point of view when it comes to countering the war effort from Russia.

I am uniquely positioned to know about the impact that this war has had on the accommodation situation when it comes to tourism and hospitality because I think I am the only person here who ever worked for Bord Fáilte and Fáilte Ireland. I know exactly the impact it has had across the country, whether in Donegal, Kerry or any other place. Some of the decision-making around that certainly was imperfect. Across a range of different areas, I believe we have to minimise taking out any form of tourism accommodation. Privately, people working in Fáilte Ireland and people who work in tourism will say that. Tourism is a critical industry for our nation. It is also an industry that has geographical distribution in ways that others do not. We need to support that and we need to do so in a complete fashion.

We are also losing sight of the contribution that Ukrainian people have made. My wife is from south Kerry and the contribution to hospitality down there has been incredible. In fact, without them, I think it would just stop. It is as simple as that. I know of young lads who are picking up glasses and washing dishes in hotels and pubs. Because they come from an agricultural background, they were driving tractors the day after they turned 16 years of age. I think the contribution that many Ukrainians have made to the Irish economy and also socially has been lost. I fundamentally believe that has been huge.

The differential between the €39 we were paying a night for tourism accommodation versus the ARP is hugely significant and something we need to bear in mind. I appreciate the volume of properties that have been used in different geographical locations has been spread disproportionately. That is probably something we could have looked at in a different way in how we were co-ordinating things.

It is obvious that there have been impacts on the rental market. Nothing is ever perfect, as I said at the outset. If we end this just like that, the impacts on the rental market in reverse will be a flood of new people coming onto the rental market. We need to bear in mind that it works both ways. When thinking about this, we need to consider how that would be managed or else people will be standing up here, shouting and roaring - rightly so - about more people being homeless.

In his contribution, the Minister said further steps will also to be taken. It is a pretty generic statement as regards to the wind-down and this being the last year. We are extending it for one more year and then we are changing the amount but there will be further steps taken in the next year. I presume these are interim steps as regards the wind-down. He might give more information as to what those are. He has obviously changed the amount and he has told us the date for closing it, but is there something additional in between? I am a little bit lost about what he said about the additional measures in the interim.

In all of this we need to consider that we are not in control of all the variables here. What happens if this war goes to a different level? What if the EU has to respond in a different way? What happens if this war escalates? It is impossible to know where the temporary protection order is going to go at an EU level. I do not expect the Government to know either. I am saying this out straight. The Minister is saying on the floor of the Dáil and in the media that this will be it in a year's time. I know other countries have acted but they may all have to

reverse course. We do not know where this is going to go. We need to be quite nimble and think about how we are going to react on this because there could be unintended consequences if we bring the shutter down in the manner the Government proposes.

I welcome that the order has been extended but there are very many unknown variables here. We need to think very deeply about the consequences of this decision if we are to close it in a year's time, because there could be many unintended consequences, some of which are not being taken on board by some Members of the Opposition or indeed by the Government.

Deputy Gary Gannon: The Social Democrats will be supporting the extension of the accommodation recognition payment from 27 March. We would like to do so at its current rate. I am conscious that in his contribution, Deputy Carthy spoke about the Opposition needing to reflect on our continued support of this scheme and we do. I reflect constantly. I reflect on the fact that today a court case was taken by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, which demonstrated in a court of law that over 2,500 asylum seekers were forced to defecate on the street, such was the lack of accommodation and how horrendously this is being handled by the Government. I reflect on the fact that private accommodation operators who entered an agreement with the State but provided no accommodation to a single refugee or asylum seeker in the country have been paid millions in settlements in recent years.

I reflect on the fact that there are people who have come to this country in search of sanctuary who were placed on the foothills of the Wicklow Mountains in all sorts of weather. We have seen tents on the Grand Canal. I reflect on the fact that a scheme like this, imperfect as it may be, also sees huge numbers of people who came to this country following a horrific invasion of their country placed in the homes of Irish people. Questions have been raised about the data with which the Irish Red Cross demonstrated that over 91% of the people providing accommodation under the ARP scheme had never been registered with the Residential Tenancies Board and had never been private providers, but that is data from the Irish Red Cross. I appreciate that not everybody took part in it but this year and last year I met numerous host families in Ireland who have opened up their doors to Ukrainian families who have become part of the make-up of their communities and their households. The scheme is imperfect, but there is no perfection here. In fact, it is all horror.

I listened to Deputy Carthy's contribution and have seen his amendment. We will certainly consider it, but I did not see what we would do differently in that regard. We are not in charge here. The Government has made these decisions. This payment is reflected far better than the giving of millions of euro over to private operators, which I am sure the Deputy will also not be in agreement with.

As regards the families I have met who have benefited from a payment such as this, I hosted a meeting in the audiovisual room a couple of weeks ago with the Irish Red Cross. There were a number of families present who had come to Ireland. One woman, whose daughter is now five, has been here since her daughter was one. She is in her school, she was in her crèche, she is perfectly integrated in our communities and she has an amazing relationship with the family that have been able to host them. It is very difficult for me to say I would like to take that away. What happens then? Where do the thousands of people who are still here in search of sanctuary while a war still rages in their country go? I genuinely do not know where they would go. I certainly do not want them to go onto the street. I do not want them to go into private

accommodation. Having them in families getting payments of €600 therefore makes sense to me. I do not really know what the alternative being suggested here is.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Read the amendment.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I have read the Deputy's amendment but I also listened to his contribution.

Deputy Matt Carthy: The Deputy should have listened to it-----

Deputy Gary Gannon: Yes, I listened to the Deputy's contribution.

The Social Democrats will support the continuation of the payment because, imperfect as it may be, it is better than the alternatives that exist. The Government does not seem to have a plan at all for the ending of the temporary directive. I listened to the Minister of State's opening contribution earlier and he talked with such vagueness about the ending of the temporary directive: something will be planned and something will happen. However, we heard the exact same speech last year and probably the year before that. There will come a time when the temporary protection directive comes to an end. It is scheduled for March 2027. All the while we talk of that, however, Russian tanks still go through Ukraine, Russian drones are still firing on cities and Russian missiles are still landing in Ukrainian cities. I would like to see a plan. I would like to see the Minister lay out to us what is actually the plan for the payment for the status of the Ukrainian community, whose members have contributed hugely in their friendship and in how they have engaged in our communities, towns and villages. They need some degree of certainty, and that needs to be provided by the Minister's Department. We need more than rhetoric.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: When the war in Ukraine broke out four years ago, one of the few pieces of hope and light in that time was the warmth, the generosity and the solidarity many people showed to those fleeing. They opened up their homes and provided those who had lost everything with somewhere they could feel safe. We talk about integration in this country and this scheme is a brilliant example of it. It formed the basis of bonds, friendships and involvement in communities in every corner of this country. These bonds meant that just last week we saw Ukrainians marching in local St. Patrick's Day parades up and down the country, celebrating the communities they are now a part of. One family my office spoke to told us about the bonds they have formed with the Ukrainian family they host. An elderly woman has hosted a mother and son these past years, and if this payment ceases, her property will not go back on the market because she did this not to be a landlady but, as the Minister of State pointed out, out of solidarity. This family spoke about the vulnerability their Ukrainian guests face as they do not have the means to rent privately. They spoke about how this mother and son's home in Ukraine is rubble now and that they have nowhere to return to. They rightly pointed out that the war is not set to end anytime soon.

Cén fáth, mar sin, a bhfuil an Rialtas ag cur deiridh leis an tacaíocht seo? Stopping this payment means putting an additional 40,000 people into an already dire housing market. Every month we are faced with spiralling homelessness figures, and instead of addressing that crisis, the solution being put forward by the Government is performative cruelty and pandering to the

far right. This will not put properties back on the rental market for "native Irish", which seems to be the goal here. This will not make anyone's lives better. We will see many people's lives made much worse. All the words we have heard in the Chamber in recent years about unwavering support for Ukraine ring hollow when we see a measure put through that is deliberately hurting Ukrainians in Ireland. These are real people and real families involved in both hosting and being hosted. They are part of our communities, and the removal of this support means they will all be worse off. We will have more pressure on the private rental market and more homelessness. It is beyond frustrating and disappointing that we see this Government turn its back on those who have fled an ongoing war and who have no home to return to. I feel the need to say it is deeply wrong.

I too have hosted somebody, not from Ukraine. This was a young man from Ethiopia who had aged out of the Tusla foster system. Tusla seeks out people who will rent out rooms at a nominal rate in order that they can get on their feet essentially in readiness for a horrifically competitive private rental market which few are ready for. I know the value it brought to him and to his life and I know what it brought to me. It just makes me so sad that this is what this Government is thinking of doing and that it wants to phase this out, when we know that it works and we know that those families who host have got so much out of this. In my previous role, I warned that there would be a two-tier response because of the temporary protection directive and how much better its terms and conditions are compared to the international protection system. However, all this Government seems to do when it is presented with that problem is go to the lowest common denominator. There is a way we can make the system better for everybody without simply going to the lowest common denominator.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: It is a bit ironic that the Government is putting a halt to this scheme in 2027 and reducing the amount now when it boasts and brags about the support it gives to Ukraine, pumping money in at EU level, some of which is potentially going in a military direction. We have a scheme here. I am not in favour of ending any scheme housing anybody in this country during a housing crisis. That should be perfectly clear. Where are people going to go? That is a serious question anyone opposing this scheme has to answer.

I will cite the Red Cross survey again because Members were taking issue with it during the previous debate. A total of 91% of hosts had not rented out rooms or their home in any way before participating in this scheme. As has been said, it was an act of solidarity for most people. We do not know what will happen when this is cut. Currently 42,000 Ukrainians are being hosted by Irish families. The cost amounts to about €11 per night, compared to €50 a night if the State were to provide that accommodation, paying commercially to hotels or other private operators. I therefore do not see how anyone can oppose this on a financial basis. A minority of the hosts have asked refugees for top-up payments. It is not a perfect scheme by any means, but one of the advantages of the scheme is that at least people are integrating into local communities and into society. They are not stuck in a huge building somewhere away from the local population. The cost of this will shoot up.

Yes, it is performative cruelty, moving in the direction that the Minister has been moving since he got in, bowing down to the far right. It is shameful that Sinn Féin is punching down. That is what it is doing. There is no proof that this is having an impact on the housing market-

Deputy Matt Carthy: Yes, there is.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: -----because of the figures that have been presented. The Deputy can shout all he likes; I am telling him now.

Deputy Matt Carthy: It is in the housing document.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Punching down is pathetic of Sinn Féin, and it will not get any votes-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: The Deputy is supporting a landlord's charter.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Allow Deputy Coppinger to speak.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: This is to give Sinn Féin something to say on a doorstep when somebody says something racist: "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, we opposed that." That is all this is about. It is-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: The Deputy is supporting a landlord's charter.

Deputy Paul Murphy: These are not landlords.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: You have to conclude, Deputy Coppinger.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Yes, they are.

Deputy Paul Murphy: A total of 91% per cent of them are not landlords.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I will sit down now but I would have liked to finish my point without being interrupted.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: I welcome the renewal of the ARP this evening and I will vote in favour of it.

It will offer clarity to the 42,000 Ukrainians in ARP-supported homes but also to the thousands of Irish families who are actively supporting them. It is very important that the Minister provide clarity on what was being briefed in the papers in terms of the move from a payment of €600 to €400. It is important that the Minister bear in mind the cost-of-living crisis that is unfolding. The Minister will reply that the payment was never a direct monetary compensation. That is correct but it is undoubtedly part of the calculus for some families who have properties supported, particularly when they are actively involved in supporting a Ukrainian family. We took important steps to support families across the country yesterday and it has to be borne in mind that we may well see a continued cost-of-living spike later this year when the Minister is considering reducing that payment. I ask him to bear that point in mind. We also have to remember that in terms of value for money, the pledged accommodation

system supported by the recognition payment is one of the most cost-effective ways of supporting vulnerable people. The pledged accommodation by the Irish Red Cross and the offer-a-home accommodation by the local authorities is a model of good practice across the European Union. That was not the case at the start, when there were teething problems, but supported by the ARP, this programme has become hugely successful. We should be looking to replicate it for other vulnerable people. Maybe for people leaving international protection accommodation, we should be looking at doing more with this model, not doing less with it.

Finally, I agree with other speakers who have said that if the temporary protection directive concludes next year, there needs to be a pathway for the 80,000 Ukrainians here. Others have spoken about merging them into the IP process. That would be a disaster as it would flood the IP process. There needs to be a pathway.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Fine Gael's manifesto for the last election states:

Fine Gael will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes. We will unequivocally support Ukraine.

I presume Fianna Fáil's manifesto said something similar. The Government supports them as long as it can use them to drive an agenda of militarisation and undermining of neutrality. However, when it comes to Ukrainian people who have fled Putin's imperialist invasion to this country, the Government is happy to use them as a scapegoat, to impose cuts on them and to have the spectre of homelessness in front of them. It cut the payment for accommodation providers, which does not go directly to Ukrainians, from €800 to €600. There are reports that the Government is going to cut it further to €400 as a step towards winding down the scheme. The result of this, if the Government follows through and if there is not a significant change in terms of the number of people who are here, will be loads of people thrown into homelessness. It will make the housing crisis worse. If this is what happens, do not worry. We will be clear in terms of who has been calling for this and who is responsible for it which is both the Government and Sinn Féin, if they actually throw all these people onto the housing market and worsen the crisis. We know from the research by the Irish Red Cross that the ARP is not squeezing renters; trying to find a place to rent is. It is disappointing to hear Sinn Féin amplifying that misleading narrative, which comes from people on the far right who are opposed to all immigration.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: It comes from the Department of housing.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Deputy can look at the figures. It does not make any sense for landlords to use this scheme. I am not saying we will not find the odd case here or there. It does not make any sense because people can make more money in other ways. They can make up to €1,166 a month tax-free from the rent-a-room scheme. They can get €600 from this, and they are going to be able to get €400 in the future. The vast majority, 71% are people living in host homes so they do not have a whole property to go. If they have a whole property, obviously, they could get much worse than that. If the Government proceeds with the cuts, the result will be people exiting the scheme. We know that 86% of people say they could not continue to host without the ARP. We know this is because we are in a cost-of-living crisis that is getting worse.

If it is ended, there could be 35,000 people suddenly trying to find private rental accommodation. The vast majority are women and children who would end up homeless, sleeping rough or trying to access totally overstretched emergency accommodation. We have a scheme that is cheap for the State and is providing accommodation for people. The idea that the Government needs to cut it back and try to bring it to an end makes no sense whatsoever. It just serves to pit ordinary people against each other and it would make the housing crisis worse.

Deputy Michael Collins: This scheme has been in operation since 2022 and has been extended multiple times since its introduction. It has involved a significant financial commitment from the State, with approximately €438 million issued in payments. Around 23,500 participating households are currently receiving support through the programme, providing accommodation for an estimated 42,000 individuals. The scheme represents an ongoing monthly cost of approximately €14.5 million. There is a clear and growing problem with the way the current rental support schemes are structured. The tax treatment available to landlords renting to beneficiaries of the temporary protection directive creates a significant financial advantage over renting to Irish tenants. Under the standard system, a landlord renting a property for €1,200 per month to an Irish tenant may pay roughly €400 per month in tax. However, under the temporary protection scheme, the first €600 per month is entirely tax exempt, leaving tax payable only on the remaining €600. In practice, this reduces the tax burden to approximately €150. It is obvious why many small landlords are opting for the scheme. The tax incentives heavily favour one route over the other. While Ireland acted swiftly and generously to support those fleeing the war in Ukraine, something we can all stand over, we are four years into this and it is increasingly clear that elements of the scheme are having unintended but very real consequences for Irish renters. The current set-up places Irish tenants at a structural disadvantage in a market where supply is dangerously limited. I have consistently argued that small landlords should receive a universal tax relief, such as a €1,000 per month tax-free allowance to keep the properties in the wider rental market and ensure fair competition for all owners. Unless the Government addresses this imbalance, more landlords will continue to exit the traditional rental system in favour of the more financially attractive option, worsening access for Irish households. The support scheme has delivered strong benefits for those it was designed to help but as it stands it creates an inequitable situation that must be corrected if we are serious about protecting fairness, supply and balanced access in the housing market.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: We have to differentiate between those who need our help and those who do not. We have made a commitment to the Ukrainian people, some of it because we are not supplying weaponry as a militarily neutral country to help the Ukrainians in their fight against the illegal Russian invasion and onslaught that has killed so many of their people. We have made a commitment and if we make a commitment, we have to continue to follow through with it. That is why I welcome the extension until 2027. The Irish Red Cross in its previous work had highlighted that a lot of the properties coming in under the ARP would not have been put onto the rental market and that remains the case. That does not mean that there are not some properties that would otherwise be rented out. However, when looked at in an holistic way, abolishing the ARP will put more people under pressure and put more pressure on the housing market. In essence, a lot of the properties here are providing a cheap way of

accommodating those who need help. I recognise no new properties are being brought into it, so it is a balance.

On the wider level, under UN conventions we have recognised consistently our need to protect those who are fleeing from persecution from elsewhere. Despite a small minority in this House and a vocal minority outside this House, we have lived up to our obligations to provide refuge to those coming here. The Minister said that we need to tighten up the process. I fully support that and the quicker processing of claims, within the six-month period. It is tied into the Ukrainian side of things purely because of the number of people who will need accommodation. Anyone granted refugee status in this country needs accommodation. However, I reiterate that the vast majority of those coming into Ireland seeking international protection have been found on appeal to be economic migrants. We do have certain areas of work where people from abroad can make a valuable contribution, but the asylum process is not the way to go through it. We need to speed up people coming in and then going back out again. We need a moratorium for people who have been here for a long time, especially children because it is inhumane to send them back after a prolonged period.

I am saying that in the knowledge that there are people in this country who have abused our welcome. People in this country who were free to come to Ireland because they are EU citizens have abused our welcome. I know there is free movement, but there are certain criteria in that regard. If the Minister is talking about sending people out of Ireland, I would be thinking about the scammers who threw a man out of a taxi or the individual who ejaculated upon a woman on the Luas. Are these sorts of people who are being told after they get a sentence - if they get a sentence - that they are no longer welcome in this country? Are they being told to get out and stay out? They are the sorts of people who should not be in this country. We should be seen to be extremely tough on them. However, the Ukrainians who are fleeing an ongoing war need our continued support. There are also people who are fleeing war and persecution in other parts of the world. We have seen the conflict in Syria and the ongoing genocide in Gaza. These sorts of people also need our ongoing support. We have obligations and we should live up to them.

I take on board what has been said about the pressures the housing crisis is putting on people. With regard to my constituency, 20% of software companies are employing people from overseas in non-essential jobs. These are all high-paid jobs. These people want to locate in the suburbs because that is where the software companies are. We need to look again at our policy as to where software and pharmaceutical companies locate. They should be in the golden triangle between Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore. If people are commuting, they should be heading westwards rather than eastwards. I have said that. There is a pressure on housing and we need to address it. However, we will not address it by looking at making it harder for vulnerable people coming here from Ukraine, Syria, Sudan and other conflict zones. We have to protect those people while at the same time getting tougher on those who, nice as they may be, are economic migrants seeking a better way of life. That should be done through the work permit system. I welcome the extension to 2027. It is the right thing to do.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I support this motion and will speak in favour of it. Four years on from Russia's brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine, Ireland's solidarity with the Ukrainian people remains as strong as ever. The Government rightly played a central role in mobilising Ireland's response to the largest movement of refugees in Europe since the Second World War.

While this presented challenges, it has largely been successful. People have been accommodated and integrated into communities right across Ireland. We all hope for a conclusion to this brutal conflict, which has claimed so many lives. A lasting peace settlement and Ukraine's speedy accession to the EU are essential.

The motion before us extends the ARP until March 2027, in line with the EU temporary protection directive. Since the scheme launched in July 2022, almost €438 million has been paid to approximately 28,000 hosts across the country, supporting 64,000 beneficiaries. As of this month, more than 23,500 active claims remain in payment, covering 42,000 people at a cost of around €14.5 million per month. Of course, this is a very significant cost to the taxpayer. It reflects the commitment of Irish support for the Ukrainian people who call Ireland their home. Behind every claim is a family who opened their home and a Ukrainian family finding their feet in a new community. In my own constituency of Dún Laoghaire and across every county in Ireland, hosts have shown extraordinary generosity. This motion honours that contribution.

I note that, alongside the extension, the monthly payment is to be reduced from €600 to €400, returning it to the rate originally set when the scheme was initially launched. I understand the rationale for this. There are legitimate concerns about the ARP's interaction with the private rental market. It is right that we manage this carefully. An orderly gradual wind-down is preferable to an abrupt end to the scheme. However, I ask that the position of the hosts be kept under close review. Many of them have taken on real costs. The reduction in the payment should not result in hosts withdrawing accommodation prematurely. The risk of displacing thousands of Ukrainian beneficiaries into an already pressured private rental market is a real concern and must be avoided at all costs.

Planning for the conclusion of temporary protection is under way and I welcome the work of senior officials and the engagement with the European Commission on transition arrangements. Ireland should play an active part in shaping a co-ordinated humane EU-wide approach.

I support this motion. Ukrainians living in Ireland are a valued part of our community. Our job is now to provide as much certainty and stability as possible for them and for the hosts who have done so much.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I thank colleagues for their contributions to this debate. I acknowledge and welcome the fact that the majority of the House will be supporting the order to extend the ARP until 2027. It is important to acknowledge that this was a very innovative and successful mechanism, introduced back in July 2022, to respond to the fact that Ireland held itself out as a very welcoming place for Ukrainian people who were fleeing the war in Ukraine and who were entitled to apply to be beneficiaries of temporary protection under the temporary protection directive. Approximately 23,500 claims are currently in payment in respect of 42,000 persons who are beneficiaries of temporary protection. It is having a very significant impact in providing accommodation to people who need it. Over the history of the scheme, since July 2022, approximately 64,000 beneficiaries of temporary protection have had the benefit of accommodation provided under the ARP.

In many respects, one of the great imponderables about this debate is that we simply do not know what is going to happen in the war in Ukraine over the next year or so. As has been indicated, temporary protection has been extended until 2027. There will obviously be discussions later this year and early next year in respect of what should happen to the temporary protection directive. To a large extent, I suspect it will depend on what happens in the war over the summer. I also believe there is a recognition among my fellow home affairs ministers within the European Union that the temporary protection directive cannot be seen to be a permanent directive. There will have to be some recognition of its temporary nature.

When the ARP scheme was originally introduced in 2022, it was very much welcomed that there was a payment of €400. That payment was predominantly for the purposes of recognising the charity of Irish people who opened their homes to Ukrainian people. It was very effective. The payment was subsequently increased to €800 and the numbers involved did rise. However, as my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Brophy, has indicated and as Deputies will be aware, from 1 June last year, the monthly payment was reduced from €800 per property per month to €600. At the time, there was concern on the part of the Minister of State and myself that this could have a very destabilising impact on the accommodation that was provided. In fact, officials indicated that could happen. Fortunately, that has not been the case and 42,000 beneficiaries of temporary protection are still being accommodated in connection with the ARP. As has been indicated, we are now going to extend the scheme until 2027, subject to the approval of the House. We will also be discussing with colleagues the proposed further reduction of the payment back to its original statutory limit of €400. The Minister of State, Deputy Brophy, and I will carefully consider that, discuss it with colleagues and come back in due course.

We will not be supporting the Sinn Féin amendment. It is interesting that Sinn Féin has very much sought to rely upon the impact the scheme has had on the rental sector. While I know they are tax-free, when you look at the payments involved and the location of the units, the properties provided pursuant to the ARP have predominantly been properties that had not previously been used in the residential tenancies market. Last year, of course, we changed the law.

In fact, it was this year.

Deputy Matt Carthy: It was this month.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: The change ensures that Part 3 of the Residential Tenancies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2026 precludes properties from the scheme that were registered with the Residential Tendencies Board at any time since March 2022. The concern that Sinn Féin has and had is now alleviated by the change in the statutory regime that was brought in by my colleague, the Minister, Deputy Browne. I thank people for the debate and I look forward to their support when it comes to voting on the motion.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is the Sinn Féin amendment to the motion agreed?

Deputy Matt Carthy: Agreed.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Not agreed.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Vótáil.

Amendment put.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The vote will be taken at the weekly division time this evening.

Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Bill 2026: Report and Final Stages

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Quaide is not here to move amendments Nos. 1 to 8, inclusive, in his name. In any event, amendments Nos. 2 and 3 and amendments Nos. 5 to 7, inclusive, have been ruled out of order.

Amendments Nos. 1 to 8, inclusive, not moved.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendment No. 9 arises out of committee proceedings.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I move amendment No. 9:

In page 5, between lines 11 and 12, to insert the following:

“Amendment of section 146 of Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015

2.The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 is amended by the substitution of the following section for section 146:

“146.(1) The Minister shall, in consultation with the Minister for Health cause a review of the functioning of this Act (other than Part 8) to be carried out before the 5th anniversary of the date of enactment of this Act.

(2) A review carried out under subsection (1) shall:

(a) consider if the process of exiting wardship of court allows for maximum engagement with the ward;

(b) include engagement with relevant stakeholders including, but not limited to:

(i) families and/or representative organisations;

(ii) health, mental health and disability service providers, so as to ensure that maximum capacity can be allowed for taking into account where existing daily supports are already enabling wards of court to make decisions;

(c) consider allowing for the revisiting of decisions made as court wardship was exited, if capacity wasn't sufficiently allowed for, and ensure that assisted decision making representation and co-decision making should be

used only where necessary, and that decision making representation is used preferably for the period of important single decisions including, but not limited to major health and financial decisions.”.”.

The Minister of State, Deputy Higgins, is hardly shocked to see this amendment in front of the House. It gives the Dáil an opportunity to deal with some of the issues. In explaining why I am making this proposal, I will start at the beginning. I was contacted by St. John of God intellectual disability services in relation to particular issues that it had at the time around wards of court. For legacy reasons, people who had some sort of inheritance or whatever were made wards of court. When they were going through the operation of being discharged, the disability service believed that these were people with a decent element of capacity and assumed that they would have been discharged altogether without the need for co-decision making or a decision-making representative.

This issue relates to the decision-making representative, DMR. The example I have used previously relates to an instance in which someone wanted to go shopping in Newry. Obviously, I am dealing with a disability service that operates in Dundalk. When a person wanted to go to Newry, the service would have had to go through their DMR. This seemed to create a huge level of difficulty. There was a fear that there may have been an element of being overprotective as the discharge process was ongoing.

The big issue here, and the reason the Minister of State looked for pre-legislative scrutiny to be waived, is that a number of people will not be discharged in time for the change that was due to come into effect on 26 April and would therefore fall into legal limbo. None of us want that to happen. I am relatively pleased to say that I have spoken to representatives of St. John of God intellectual disability services and they have engaged with a number of officials from the Courts Service. They were highly impressed and really appreciative of the engagement. They have come up with some methods. An independent assessment has to be made on a ward of court who is to be discharged, obviously. St. John of God would like certain information, such as the mitigations and the support factors surrounding these people, to be in front of the court. It about making sure that all the information it knows is passed on. In fairness, there seems to be an improvement in relation to that. There were some very straight conversations around these supports. There will be continued engagement from here on in. That is all very positive.

The other piece of positivity that I spoke to previously is the fact that the entire Bill is being reviewed. Obviously, there was insufficient capacity to deal with all of the wards of court who needed to be discharged. We need to ensure we deal with discharging those wards of court within the next 18 months. We do not want to be back facing this circumstance again. The review is all important for a number of reasons. We know there are huge issues in relation to using banking services that have become more difficult. St. John of God is one of the groups that brought that particular issue up. Families have issues in relation to the engagement. We need to make absolutely sure that the Bill is focused on those who need the support. In addition, there must be real engagement with those who are wards of court at the moment or those who will fall under these parameters in the future. In some cases, we are talking about some of our most vulnerable people, such as those who need disability services, mental health services and whatever else. We get the idea that it is about ensuring that people are given the maximum support they need, while assuming as much capacity as possible from the point of view of

allowing them to live their lives. This created difficulties in the beginning for some of the disability services that I spoke to. They were probably too protective in how they operated, and then they had to free up how they operate to some degree. Like us, they learned from their mistakes. I have seen some positives where previously I would have been worried. Again, the big thing is that it is about engagement with all of the stakeholders such as the disability, healthcare and mental health services. It is about engaging properly with families and parents so they do not feel left out. It is absolutely about engaging with those people we are attempting to give support to.

The big thing is that we ensure the review is comprehensive and deals with a number of these sets of circumstances. We must also address some of what is in the public domain to a degree, whether it relates to the banking sector, to families or to the issue I have brought forward. The interaction between St. John of God intellectual disability services and the Courts Service, following on from the meeting between the Department, the Courts Services and ourselves when we agreed to waive pre-legislative scrutiny, has been positive. I am not going to put this to a vote, but it is worthwhile that we air these particular issues.

7 o'clock

Deputy Gillian Toole: Similarly to an Teachta Ó Murchú, I commend the Minister of State and her team for the work that has been done to date. I laud the fact that the review process will be brought forward. That is important. I will not be pedantic and repeat what has already been said. There has been that offer of collaboration from Professor O'Flynn in University of Galway. I have passed on the details of the relevant person in the Department. We would have received some correspondence from Justice for Wards. The review process will be timely and highly beneficial to all parties. It will also be an opportunity to measure the progress as well, given the extension that has been enabled for due process to continue. We must encourage trust and engagement from those who might have been a little reticent heretofore that people are brought along in a spirit of collaboration and in the best interests and to achieve that will and preference for those who are vulnerable and concerned.

An Ceann Comhairle: Does Deputy Quaide wish to come in?

Deputy Liam Quaide: I came in just after Deputy Ó Murchú started.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Quaide can speak to Deputy Ó Murchú's amendment, but I am afraid we have gone past the Deputy's amendments.

Deputy Liam Quaide: Is this amendments Nos. 1 and 4?

An Ceann Comhairle: We are discussing amendment No. 9. The Deputy has seven minutes if he wishes to speak.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I have lost track a little bit here. I will pass over.

Minister of State at the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (Deputy Emer Higgins): I thank all Deputies in the House and on the disability matters committee for their constructive and robust engagement on this important Bill, both to date and on Second Stage and Committee Stage. I know there is widespread agreement on the need for this Bill to ensure that wards of court who are due to transition out of wardship have the legal certainty that they require and they are enabled to move through the discharge process in a fair and an orderly manner. It is crucial that both wards and committees are supported as they move through this process of transitioning out of wardship and into the new rights-based framework of decision support arrangements. A key issue that was raised throughout discussions, and both Deputies Ó Murchú and Toole raised it again today, was around the need for meaningful consultation and engagement with stakeholders, including wards and committees. I reiterate my commitment to continued engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including those with lived experience of the provisions of the assisted decision-making legislation. As Deputy Toole has done earlier, I reiterate and reaffirm my Department's commitment to bringing that wider review of the legislation forward earlier than planned. We are beginning preparations with a view to starting that this year.

I thank Deputy Ó Murchú for what he has said in relation to St. John of God's. It is great to hear that they were highly impressed by the meetings and consultations that happened afterwards. That is down to the Courts Service, and to three of my officials, who are here today, namely Jane-Ann Duffy, Melanie Campbell and Orla Cooper, who put a lot of work in following our discussions. I acknowledge them today. I acknowledge that productive meetings were held and specific cases were raised at them and have been discussed. I thank everybody for their engagement on this. It is an important Bill. We will move tomorrow to the Seanad through all Stages, we hope, with a view to getting this moved as quickly as possible so we can provide legal certainty to our wards as they move out of wardship.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: As I said previously, it is vital legislation in the sense that we find ourselves in this place. I could make the argument that we should not have found ourselves in this place. Enough time should have been put aside. I have, once again, put on the record some of the issues and the worries I had. I will commend the interaction that there has been. The big thing for all of us is that idea that we review and make sure we deal with those anomalies that exist where those with a disability who are in disability services and previously could have got a bank account with two signatories, that this has now become at times a near impossibility. In cases, people have gone to the credit union or other institutions to try to work around it, but that is not good enough.

I reiterate that idea that we need to make sure that we have the maximum amount of engagement with the stakeholders, the likes of disability services such as St. John of God's and others, but also good engagement with families and those relations who have been involved in the care of their children, in an awful lot of cases, for all their lives. We need to ensure at the core of it is, in this case, the ward of courts, and then all those people who will fall under this particular bracket. Because we are going through courts, I am always worried about logjams and everything else. We need to make sure we have the adequate resources and that we do not have hold-ups that are not necessary. The big one is about supporting those who need support, but also providing those that have capacity with as much freedom as we possibly can.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I echo the point made by Deputy Ó Murchú. Research undertaken by the National Disability Authority has indicated that people have not been supported sufficiently to understand what the end of the wardship system means for them and those supporting them. We must ensure that all those who come within the scope of the original Act, namely, disabled people, older people and people with severe mental health difficulties have a legal right to accessible information, meaningful engagement and practical supports, including independent advocacy. That is a crucial point in terms of upholding human rights. The National Disability Authority research notes that despite information efforts by public bodies, many wards and committees experience what was described as an "information vacuum" and confusion about roles and responsibilities within the system. That tells us that issuing information is not the same as ensuring understanding to a reasonable degree.

In the transition to rights-based in practice, accessible formats, practical navigation supports and independent advocacy must be consistently available. Where extensions are granted, the additional time should be used actively to support informed participation. There has been a failure to appropriately resource the public bodies most involved in the implementation of the Act, such as the Decision Support Service, Legal Aid Board and National Advocacy Service in order to achieve that goal. I am calling on the Minister of State to commit to providing further resources to the public bodies involved in implementing the legislation to ensure that those impacted have their human rights fully upheld. This includes additional resources to the bodies I mentioned. It is important that we have that concrete commitment as we proceed with this legislation.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: A lot of the amendments are along the same theme and are similar to Committee Stage and the Second Stage debate, which I contributed to. I do not know if the Minister of State is accepting amendments, but what is more important is the principle that she is hearing what is being said and showing a willingness to engage and be responsive to what she is hearing. I have a number of questions and queries in relation to the system as it exists from people affected. For example, what is the complaints mechanism for bringing a complaint against the DSS if one has a complaint? What is the degree to which IHREC is assessing the legislation, if it is doing that? If it is not, why not? There is concern, and this was raised with me at a constituency clinic, that assessments are being done without notification being given to families where it applies, such as in the case of wards resident in nursing homes.

It seems the system is not working in a joined-up way that allows it to communicate effectively with whomever it needs to communicate with. Regardless of whether she is accepting amendments or not, the Minister of State is hearing clearly what is being said about the willingness to engage, meet and ensure that the system is robust and responsive.

Deputy Emer Higgins: On Deputy O'Rourke's question, the Department briefed IHREC on the proposed amendments in advance of taking the legislation through the Houses.

In the context of Deputy Quaide's question on resourcing, the decision support services received an uplift in their budget this year for that reason. We trust that the services will use that money accordingly.

We all agree that consultation is the name of the game here. That is something the Department has done. When we first got Cabinet approval for this we immediately went out and consulted with key stakeholders. We did that online and in person. We had a key consultation meeting earlier this month in relation to this Bill.

Some of the issues that were raised related to the parameters of financial agreements. Ultimately, a number of people stated that they thought there should be better support from a financial perspective. That is something we are taking on board. I have written to the Minister for Finance to see if there is any support he can provide to people in this situation and to the committees going forward.

We are on the same page when it comes to consultation. That is why we will be starting our consultation on the review of the legislation ahead of schedule. As I said, preparatory work has already been done and we will be starting that later this year.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: There is a certain consistency regarding what was stated on Second Stage and on Committee Stage. There is the idea that we want a framework. We want something that works. Everybody accepts that the legislation is necessary. There is a logjam. There are a number of people who were not going to be discharged as wards of court, and nobody wanted to see them left in limbo. It is about making sure that the review can look at all the weaknesses that exist in the assisted decision-making legislation. It is also about ensuring that the discharging process works as well as it possibly can.

I reiterate the absolute necessity of engagement with families and with the person who is in need of support, as well as the wider stakeholders like disability services. What I saw with St. John of God intellectual disability services and the level of engagement involved was great. I appreciate the efforts of the officials from the Department and the Courts Service who were involved in that regard. The Minister of State indicated that there will be a number of events in which they will be involved. That is absolutely necessary. We need to make sure the issues that exist across banking and so on are dealt with. As I said, the really positive thing I got when speaking to the representatives of St. John of God disability services was that while it had been very worried about assisted decision-making at the outset and had thought they would not be able to protect those who needed protection, when the organisation stretched itself and put supports in place, both it and those in its care benefited. We need to see more of that. It is about allowing someone the maximum freedom to be everything they can be.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Bill received for final consideration.

Question, "That the Bill do now pass", put and declared carried.

National Oil Reserve Agency (Amendment) Bill 2026: Committee and Remaining Stages

NEW SECTION

Deputy Pa Daly: I move amendment No.1:

In page 3, between lines 10 and 11, to insert the following:

“Amendment of section 34 of the National Oil Reserves Agency Act 2007

1. Section 34 of the National Oil Reserves Agency Act 2007 is amended by adding a new paragraph after paragraph (2):

“(3) The Minister shall, within three months of the reduction of the NORA levy during the period identified in section 37(1A)(b) coming into effect, prepare and lay before Dáil Éireann a report examining the impact of providing this reduction. The report should assess the impact on cost and affordability across different sectors of the economy including but not exclusive to households, carers and people with disabilities, those living in rural Ireland, SMEs and road hauliers. The report should conduct the analysis on a county-by-county basis, particularly focusing on counties with a large proportion of their population dependent on home heating oil. The report should also explore alternative measures that could be applied to absorb price shocks.”.

We want to amend section 34 of the 2007 Act such that it will state that the Minister shall, within three months of the reduction of the NORA levy during the period identified in section 37(1A)(b) coming into effect, prepare and lay before Dáil Éireann a report examining the impact of providing this reduction. The report should assess the impact on cost and affordability across different sectors of the economy including but not exclusive to households, carers, people with disabilities, those living in rural Ireland and SMEs. The report should conduct the analysis on a county-by-county basis, particularly focusing on counties with a large proportion of their population dependent on home heating oil. The report should also explore alternative measures that could be applied to absorb price shocks.

Earlier today, the Minister mentioned the national energy affordability task force. Clearly, half of the meeting must have been taken up with introductions because they would have probably forgotten each other because they have met so few times over the past year. The task force was established to identify and assess measures that will enhance energy affordability for households and businesses, but the plan in that regard is still being developed. The necessary urgency is not there. Having spoken to people locally who are dealing with renewable energy, I am aware that there are amendments that need to be made across the board.

Recently, I met two people in Ballyheigue who had just bought electric vehicles, EVs. They are exempt from petrol and diesel increases, obviously, but there needs to be a more targeted approach. One third of the money that is set aside for EVs goes to people who have bought cars worth more than €55,000. A lot of money is being given to people who do not necessarily need it.

Retrofitting needs to be targeted, as outlined in the amendment, to address more houses. There should be an assessment of the position of people who live in rural Ireland on a county-by-county basis.

A lot of older people do not want to move out of their houses for a deep retrofit. They do not want to have the hassle of it and they do not have the money to expend on it. They continue, therefore, to use solid fuel and oil. While the warmer homes scheme is a good scheme, there are huge delays in it. I am hoping this amendment will keep minds focused in a way they have not been over the past year.

In his opening statement, the Minister mentioned that an expert advisory subgroup monitoring global supply, etc., was being established. We are concerned that there will be extra delays with this group. The Minister said he had written to retail and electricity and gas suppliers, as well as the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, CRU, and fuel suppliers, to emphasise the importance of reducing the exposures to consumers. Sinn Féin produced legislation on this, which we moved only a few weeks ago, to give the CRU more powers to and strengthen the energy regulator's powers to investigate hedging strategies, anti-competitive behaviour and unjustified pricing practices. It would impose a duty on the energy companies. If the Minister has spoken to those companies, I hope he asked them to disclose detailed pricing data to the regulator, on which the regulator can then report to regulate the standing charges that are often used as an excuse by the energy companies. Last summer, we saw one energy company raise its prices twice, using the excuse of the network and standing charges. However, when one analyses how much these charges are, the increases amount to much more than the standing charges. What is often missed in debates such as this one and with the insurance companies, for example, is the need not only to make profit in the current year but to make additional profit the following year. That is the real motivation. These companies need to be held to account and there should be a prioritisation network. The purpose of this amendment is to keep minds focused in the task force and to have the Government hold the companies to account within three months of the reduction of the NORA levy. It could be reviewed one way or the other, but we should at least have a review.

Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta as an leasú. Labhróidh mé ar an leasú. Ní féidir liom glacadh leis. Ba chóir don Teachta a bheith cinnte go bhfuil muidne ar an gcoiste inacmhainneachta ag obair ar na tacaíochtaí is féidir linn a thabhairt isteach go luath. Tá an obair sin á déanamh againn anois. Rinne an coiste a lán rudaí roimh cháinaisnéis 2026. Tá rudaí isteach sa dlí anois mar gheall ar an obair sin. Ní féidir liom glacadh leis an leasú sin.

I cannot accept the amendment. I assure the Deputy that the national energy affordability task force will keep this matter under review. The committee meets on a regular basis. I chaired it last week and it is meeting again tomorrow. The subcommittee the Deputy referred to is simply advisory. It is specifically focused on the Middle Eastern supply and the breakdown of energy supply. On the specific matter regarding the NORA levy, there is a 2 cent reduction, which is a temporary measure to help to affray costs, plus the excise duty reduction and we are also backdating the diesel rebate scheme for the haulage sector until 1 January. This will be of assistance.

I thank the Irish Road Haulage Association for its constructive engagement with us on this. All of the measures we have brought forward are targeted and temporary. We will keep them under active review. Of that, the Deputy can be absolutely assured.

While the suggestion from Teachta Daly is a good one, I assure him that the committee and I will keep this matter under regular review. I am conscious that the levy we are now removing will mean there will be less funds going into NORA. That is a short-term measure to try to affray cost increases. Mar a dúirt mé, ní féidir liom glacadh leis an leasú sin.

Amendment put and declared lost.

SECTION 1

Deputy Eoin Hayes: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 3, to delete lines 24 to 31 and in page 4, to delete lines 1 to 3.

As we discussed earlier, the substance of this amendment is to remove section 1(b) from the amendment Bill. The Minister should take that under consideration. In contrast to every other energy measure announced by the Government this week, all of which had a time limit of two months, this Bill authorises another 18 months in potential tax cuts which gut the Climate Action Fund. I have serious concerns about that. If I look at the 2024 Climate Action Fund report to see what the Government might defund, it includes the community Climate Action Fund for local authorities, bog rehabilitation, solar panels on schools and improving the energy efficiency of public buildings. This is potentially giving the Minister the unfettered power to stop all that climate action for 20 months in the middle of an energy crisis and when we are supposed to making progress on climate action.

People may ask what planet the Minister is on. It seems as if he wants to burn this one. I wish to be clear with my colleagues and the public. This is what is called non-voted expenditure. That means that the levy is created by legislation and ring-fenced for NORA, which is then authorised by the Minister to transfer the funds to the Climate Action Fund. In that process, there is no Dáil vote, no budget set by the Minister for Finance and voted on in October and no Cabinet discussion required. It is completely at the discretion of one person. Even the 2020 Act authorising the Climate Action Fund does not allow that kind of action with no oversight. It specifically states:

... the Minister may, in each financial year commencing with the financial year in which the *National Oil Reserves Agency (Amendment) and Provision of Central Treasury Services Act 2020* is commenced, following consultation with the Agency, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Minister for Finance, give a direction to the Agency to pay into the Climate Action Fund in that financial year the amount specified in the direction.

Even the original transfers to the Climate Action Fund require consultation with someone else. However, by crazy contrast, this Bill requires no consultation with anyone for a tax cut of up to €200 million. The Minister did not tell us this in his opening remarks. His Department's memorandum on the Bill did not describe this dynamic. Either the Minister and his Department did not realise what they were doing or they have hidden something from the Dáil and the public. That is a very serious matter in either instance.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: That is a serious charge. The Deputy should withdraw it.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: I am not withdrawing it. The Minister was not transparent on it.

We have put forward this amendment, which would require the Minister to at least seek further approval from the Oireachtas, as he would be required to do in the case of any other emergency energy measure. That is only reasonable. It is only in keeping with the Government's commitments on excise taxes and haulier rebates, which were authorised last night and have a deadline of two months' time. What is most shocking about this Bill is that the Government has not been upfront and honest about it. It has done it an underhand way with 24 hours' notice, asking the Dáil to grant it unprecedented financial power. It is an

unprecedented reversal on climate action. The Government thought no one would notice. Some of us do notice. We do our homework. This potential raiding of the Climate Action Fund for a year and a half, by a single Minister without Oireachtas or Cabinet oversight, at the expense of future generations should not stand.

No Member of the Oireachtas who believes in climate action should stand for unlimited power this year and the next to raid the Climate Action Fund. Earlier today, the Minister said he wanted to do more to support families during the energy crisis. Then he should tell me what community groups that are reliant on the community climate action funding he will deprive if he pushes this through in the future. He said his resolve to support renewable energy has never been stronger. Then he should tell me exactly which schools will not have solar panels if he continues with this relief beyond the two months. He spoke about Ireland doing far more than the UK. Is the UK authorising a potential reversal of any bog rehabilitation and climate action? What will the Minister say to the people in the boglands of Offaly about that? What will be his response to Deputy Clendennen, who spoke eloquently about Offaly leading in climate action? How will he explain to him that he is stripping millions from his constituency with this measure if he continues with it? This is not good enough. It is obfuscation, it is a rush and it is a power grab. The real question is how committed is this Government to climate action so I urge the Minister to support our amendment.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: A figure of €200 million is a huge amount of money. I know the Minister may say that he has no intention of pulling this money from the Climate Action Fund but the potential is there using this particular piece of legislation. That in itself is very concerning.

One of the reasons I am really worried about this is because climate action always plays second fiddle to every other required or necessary spend the State makes. It always finds it really hard. It is difficult to get money for climate action and so when money has been identified and reserved for a particular purpose, it is really important that it is used for that purpose. To dip into it could essentially be the thin edge of the wedge when it comes to that particular fund. That is the reason the Social Democrats do not believe in reducing or stopping the carbon tax. It is because we recognise that setting aside money to ensure that people who are finding it difficult to make the transition to a fossil fuel-free future and need to be supported by the State will have the same opportunities when it comes to climate action as wealthier residents in the country. This fund, which is facilitated through the NORA levy for climate action, is very important and fulfils a very important function.

The Climate Action Fund is not just for emission reduction measures. It is not often as an Opposition TD that one can say one influenced legislation but an amendment I put forward in the previous Dáil on the NORA legislation was to ensure that biodiversity projects for nature-based solutions could also be funded through the Climate Action Fund because I thought that was a really important aspect of it. If we are about talking about climate action and climate resilience, using nature to build that resilience is very important but, again, there are always problems finding funding for biodiversity measures or nature-based solution measures. To be able to get that done through the legislation with the assistance and support of the previous Minister, Eamon Ryan, was important.

It is unfortunate that it looks like one of the very few funds that is available for biodiversity and nature-based solution measures could potentially be significantly reduced without the Minister having to come back and seek approval from the Dáil. It needs to be a democratic decision and there needs to be transparency about it and that is why we think signing this legislation as it currently stands and has been proposed by the Government gives far too much scope. This is not necessarily about the Minister. It is any Minister who could be taking that role. That is why we have serious concerns. We do not believe that this aspect of the Bill is necessary. It has not been done with the other emergency measures. We would ask the Minister to remove that aspect of the Bill and agree to our amendment and that in the event that a Government decision is made to continue a reduction in the NORA levy, it has to come back to be debated in and be a decision of the Dáil.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Gabhaim buíochas leis na Teachtaí as ucht an leasaithe. Labhróidh mé i gcomhthéacs an leasaithe anois. Ní féidir liom glacadh leis. Ní aontaím leis na rudaí a dúirt na Teachtaí. I do not agree with what Deputy Hayes said. I understand it and will take it at face value that his concerns are genuine. I have no reason to think otherwise. There is nothing underhand about this at all. It is a bit of a stretch. Deputy Hayes spoke about a raid of the Climate Action Fund. That is not it at all. This is a short-term temporary measure to reduce costs to households and businesses. It is on a two-month basis. It is very clearly set out. If it was underhand, it would not be printed in the legislation. It is not a very long Bill. It is not that it was hidden anywhere. One can read it very clearly in about three minutes. Homework is not three minutes but fair play for picking up something that is very clearly set down in the Bill itself so I commend the Deputy for that

I have no intention of extending this for 18 months. There is a sunset clause within it so it means within that period of time. If the situation got worse and we had to extend it, it gives the ability in this to extend it but that decision would be a decision that I would bring to Cabinet. I can assure the Deputy that Members would be informed of that. The Climate Action Fund is in surplus to the tune of €265 million that is unallocated. We are continuing and accelerating measures around retrofitting and biodiversity restoration. The Deputy mentioned bogland restoration. A total of 33,000 ha have been restored over the last period of time. Some incredible work is happening there. There has been incredible work on the community side on climate action so I am not trying to in any way cut into that. I have responsibilities as environment Minister to ensure that we do that.

I will not be accepting the Deputy's amendment. That is not the intention of what is here. The Deputy read it in a different way. That is fine. That is his wont. That is not what we are going to do. This is a measure to affray increases in costs that people are suffering because of an international situation. NORA itself is in surplus and needs to retain a surplus as well. The cost of this over the two-month period is approximately €20 million - probably less because the NORA levy receipts vary month by month. The clause is a sunset clause. This dies off after that period of time. It does not give a Minister the ability to extend but I can assure the House that I will bring any extension to this to Cabinet and that decision will be made by Cabinet. It is not something we would do lightly. It does not in any way impinge on the climate action worker funding we are providing for groups right across the country. I could go into all this but it is more for an environmental debate. We have done over 2,000 schools, 240,000-plus homes have been retrofitted and 4,000 businesses last year alone. We are targeting 73,000

homes this year. We have amended the grants. The Deputy's concerns are obviously genuine. I am telling him that this is not the intention of it and as we do with everything, we will do that in a transparent way. If we were to extend it, that would be a matter I would bring back to Cabinet and we will inform the House in that way. I will not be accepting the amendment.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: I thank the Minister for committing to bringing it to Cabinet. He did not have to do that so I appreciate it. Bringing any other oversight to it involving the Dáil or committees is laudable and I am glad to see the Minister engage on a good faith basis on that.

I also acknowledge the climate action that is ongoing. Retrofitting, solar panels and the rehabilitation of bogs are very positive and the Social Democrats are very supportive of that. The fear is that if the Minister continued with a reduction in the levy to the Climate Action Fund, those things would stop and there would be no further bog rehabilitation and no further schools photovoltaic programme.

That is a very real concern and that is what this Bill allows. Importantly, the Minister said that it was specified in the Bill. I see no reference in this Bill to the Climate Action Fund - not one. It does not articulate the fact that this levy goes to climate action. It goes to the Climate Action Fund. That is not in this Bill.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: It goes to NORA and then an element of it is forwarded.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: Yes, and then 80% of it goes to the Climate Action Fund. The entirety of the Climate Action Fund, or 99% of it, is funded by this levy so the Minister cannot tell me he is being transparent. The Minister cannot tell me that he was totally upfront with the Dáil here; he was not. The Minister did not mention it in his opening remarks. It is not in the Bill. It is not in the explanatory memorandum from the Department. It is important that the Minister be upfront with people on this, that the levy is, in fact, the only major funder of the Climate Action Fund in the State and that, without it, we will strip €10 million a year from schools for solar panels. That is what we are talking about here.

The Minister is correct that the levy is approximately €10 million a month. It goes up and down, as the Minister said. It was approximately €120 million, as it was, in 2024 and it is forecast in the explanatory memorandum as being approximately the same for this year. That is a very significant chunk of money over a very long period of time.

What we are saying is that it is fair enough to give relief for two months, as it is in excise and as it is in haulage, but to say that the Minister should have the power to extend it by another €180 million and strip the Climate Action Fund of all its funding for this year and next is an insane proposition. The proviso that allows the Minister to do that in this Bill, which, by the way, does not mention the Climate Action Fund and is not transparent on that, should stand, and so I will be pressing the amendment.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: I do not understand the difference between the Climate Action Fund and the NORA levy that funds it and the carbon tax. It is really important that the Government has stood strong with the carbon tax and it is being very clear that it is to be ring-fenced for climate action. Only today, in the Dáil, the Taoiseach was highly critical of Sinn Féin and the fact that Sinn Féin continually asked for the carbon tax to be scrapped or reduced.

Indeed, what the Taoiseach said was that it "is essential to guarantee ring-fenced funding for the retrofitting of homes, the warmer homes initiative and the retrofitting of local authority housing, all of which will help working people to permanently reduce their bills into the future." The Taoiseach described Sinn Féin as being "hypocritical" to call for a reduction in carbon tax. It is hypocritical of the Government to say that the carbon tax is fundamental to our climate ambitions and our climate action while at the same time reducing the NORA levy in a way that it could possibly be done over 18 months without bringing it back to the floor of the Dáil or without bringing it to a committee. It is a decision for the Government, through the Cabinet, that the Minister could do that and take up to €200 million out of the Climate Action Fund. I cannot square that circle.

They are very similar funds, in my opinion, and it is important to protect both of them. I can understand, as a short-term two-month measure, reducing the NORA levy, but this could potentially extend it. I know the Minister says that is not his intention, that is not the point and this is a sunset clause, but the effect of this sunset clause will mean that we will not have to debate this again. The Minister will not have to report back to the Dáil and that is concerning.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: D'fhreagair mé ceisteanna an Teachta. Níl aon rud fágtha le rá agam faoi sin. Níl mé ag glacadh leis an leasú.

Amendment put:

The Committee divided: Tá, 58; Níl, 85; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Aird, William.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Boland, Grace.	
Brady, John.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brennan, Brian.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brennan, Shay.	
Carthy, Matt.	Brophy, Colm.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Browne, James.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Burke, Colm.	
Cronin, Réada.	Burke, Peter.	
Crowe, Seán.	Butler, Mary.	
Cullinane, David.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Cummins, Jen.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Daly, Pa.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Devine, Máire.	Cahill, Michael.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Calleary, Dara.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Canney, Seán.	
Gannon, Gary.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Gould, Thomas.	Collins, Michael.	
Graves, Ann.	Collins, Niall.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Connolly, John.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Cooney, Joe.	
Hearne, Rory.	Crowe, Cathal.	

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

	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghail, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Tóibín, Peadar.	
	Troy, Robert.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Eoin Hayes and Jennifer Whitmore; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

Section 1 agreed to.

Section 2 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment, received for final consideration and passed.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Bill will now be sent to the Seanad.

Estimates for Public Services 2026

Minister for Transport (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I move the following Revised Estimates:

Vote 1 — President's Establishment (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €6,198,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Secretary General to the President, for certain other expenses of the President's Establishment and for certain grants.

Vote 2 — Department of the Taoiseach (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €36,290,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Department of the Taoiseach, including certain services administered by the Department and for payment of grants.

Vote 3 — Office of the Attorney General (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €30,709,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Attorney General, including a grant.

Vote 4 — Central Statistics Office (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €116,053,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Central Statistics Office.

Vote 5 — Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €82,119,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Vote 6 — Office of the Chief State Solicitor (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €59,881,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Chief State Solicitor.

Vote 7 — Office of the Minister for Finance (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €58,165,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Finance, including the Paymaster-General's Office, for certain services administered by the Office of the Minister and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 8 — Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €12,349,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Vote 9 — Office of the Revenue Commissioners (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €610,728,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, including certain other services administered by that Office.

Vote 10 — Tax Appeals Commission (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €4,090,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Tax Appeals Commission.

Vote 13 — Office of Public Works (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €801,313,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries

and expenses of the Office of Public Works; for services administered by that Office and for payment of certain grants and for the recoupment of certain expenditure.

Vote 16 — Tailte Éireann (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €100,872,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of Tailte Éireann and certain minor services, and that a sum not exceeding €579,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 20 — Garda Síochána (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €2,619,421,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Garda Síochána, including pensions, etc. for the payment of certain witnesses' expenses, and for payment of certain grants, and that a sum not exceeding €17,310,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 21 — Prisons (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €569,122,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Prison Service, and other expenses in connection with prisons, including places of detention, and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 22 — Courts Service (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €180,459,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for such of the salaries and expenses of the Courts Service and of the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, the High Court, the Special Criminal Court, the Circuit Court and the District Court and of certain other minor services as are not charged to the Central Fund, and that a sum not exceeding €5,047,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 23 — An Coimisiún Toghcháin (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €11,940,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of An Coimisiún Toghcháin.

Vote 24 — Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €2,614,134,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration,

Probation Service staff and of certain other services including payments under cash-limited schemes administered by that Office, and payment of certain grants.

Vote 25 — Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €10,483,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 26 — Education and Youth (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €12,996,152,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Education and Youth, for certain services administered by that Office, and for the payments of certain grants.

Vote 27 — International Co-operation (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €865,199,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for certain Official Development Assistance, including certain grants, and for contributions to certain International Organisations involved in Development Assistance and for salaries and expenses in connection therewith.

Vote 28 — Foreign Affairs and Trade (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €414,027,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, and for certain services administered by that Office, including grants and contributions to International Organisations.

Vote 29 — Climate, Energy and the Environment (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €1,061,119,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment including certain services administered by that Office, and for payment of certain grants, and that a sum not exceeding €77,011,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 30 — Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €1,817,835,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, including certain services administered by that Office and for payment of certain grants and subsidies and for the payment of certain grants under cash-limited schemes, and that a sum not exceeding €29,091,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services

of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 31 — Transport (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €4,740,219,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Transport, including certain services administered by that Office, for payment of certain grants and certain other services.

Vote 32 — Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €1,308,265,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, including certain services administered by that Office, for the payment of certain subsidies and grants and for the payment of certain grants under cash-limited schemes, and that a sum not exceeding €21,315,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 33 — Culture, Communications and Sport (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €1,327,007,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport including certain services administered by that Office, and for payment of certain subsidies and grants.

Vote 34 — Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €8,946,300,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage including grants to Local Authorities, grants and other expenses in connection with housing, water services, miscellaneous schemes, subsidies, grants and payment of certain grants under cash-limited schemes.

Vote 35 — Army Pensions (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €312,477,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for retired pay, pensions, compensation, allowances and gratuities payable under sundry statutes to or in respect of members of the Defence Forces and certain other Military Organisations, etc., and for sundry contributions and expenses in connection therewith; for certain extra-statutory children's allowances and other payments and for sundry grants.

Vote 36 — Defence (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €1,154,067,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Defence, including certain services

administered by that Office; for the pay and expenses of the Defence Forces; and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 37 — Social Protection (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €14,066,335,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Social Protection, for certain services administered by that Office, for payments to the Social Insurance Fund, for certain grants and including payments under cash-limited schemes administered by that Office.

Vote 38 — Health (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €26,940,403,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Health and certain other services administered by that Office, including grants to the Health Service Executive and miscellaneous grants.

Vote 39 — Uisce Éireann (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €2,250,000,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for payment of grants to Uisce Éireann.

Vote 40 — Children, Disability and Equality (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €7,032,057,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, for certain services administered by that Office and for the payment of grants, and that a sum not exceeding €9,000,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 41 — An tÚdarás Póilíneachta agus Sábháilteachta Pobail (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €6,546,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of An tÚdarás Póilíneachta agus Sábháilteachta Pobail and for the payment of certain grants.

Vote 42 — Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €576,767,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht including certain services administered by that Office and for the payment of grants, and that a sum not exceeding €21,800,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 43 — Data Protection Commission (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €32,763,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Data Protection Commission.

Vote 44 — Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €3,799,071,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science for certain services administered by that Office, and for the payments of certain grants.

Vote 45 — Fiosrú (Revised Estimate).

That a sum not exceeding €24,205,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2026, for the salaries and expenses of Fiosrú.

Votes put and agreed to.

Consideration of Estimates by Committee: Motion

Minister for Transport (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I move:

That, notwithstanding the Order of the Dáil of 3rd day of March, 2026 and, pursuant to Standing Order 223(1), the following Committee may complete its consideration of the Estimates for Public Services for the year ending 31st December, 2026, standing referred to them pursuant to Standing Order 222(2), later than the eightieth day and not later than the one hundred and thirty-fourth day, being the 30th day of April, 2026, after the Estimates had been so referred:

— the Select Committee on Education and Youth (Vote 26).

Question put and agreed to.

Energy and Fuel Costs: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Pearse Doherty on Wednesday, 18 March 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

recognises that:

- workers and families have been hit by an unrelenting cost-of-living crisis;
- the Government have failed to act to end this rip-off, and get prices under control;

- the turmoil in international energy markets, as a result of the unjustified attacks on Iran, is compounding an existing cost-of-living crisis, and risks causing severe hardship for many people;
- inflation was running far above the Government's projections, even before the most recent shock in energy markets;
- record levels of people were already unable to pay their electricity bills, with 319,459 in arrears, and one in four people unable to pay their gas bills, with many more struggling to keep from falling behind;
- the number of people at risk of poverty increased in 2025; and
- the Government got it badly wrong when they decided to withdraw cost of living supports;

notes with concern that:

- in this context, the rapid rise in the price of petrol, diesel and home heating oil has placed more pressure on workers and families; and
- the Government has legislated to increase the price of home heating oil in a matter of weeks; and

calls on the Government to:

- scrap plans to increase taxes on home heating oil on May 1st; and
- immediately reduce the cost of petrol, diesel and home heating oil, by implementing Sinn Féin's Mineral Oil Tax (Emergency Cost of Living Reduction) Bill 2026.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

"notes that, the Government:

- remains deeply concerned about the escalating conflict in the Middle East and the Gulf;
- affirms Ireland's long track-record of support for international law and the United Nations;
- continues to seek de-escalation through dialogue and diplomacy so that these issues can be resolved;
- is acutely aware of the impact on households and businesses of the recent increases in fuel prices, and is actively monitoring the current geopolitical situation and developments in energy markets;
- affirms that energy affordability is a priority, and highlights that successive Budgets have provided targeted support to help households with cost-of-living pressures; and

- remains committed to decarbonising our society, increasing investment in renewable energy sources, and using revenues raised to protect those most vulnerable to fuel poverty through targeted welfare interventions;

affirms that:

- the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance, with Department of Finance officials, is monitoring international and national developments in fuel markets, alongside the latest macro-economic impacts;
- the Government is working to calibrate an appropriate response, to be brought forward in the coming days, to ease the burden on affected households; and
- engagement at European Union level is continuing, including at a meeting of the European Council this week;

recalls that:

- Carbon Tax revenues are ring-fenced for climate action and just transition measures;
- Budget 2026 provided over €1.1 billion in advancement of these goals, with €350 million of those funds allocated to targeted social protection interventions;
- Budget 2026 extended the 9 per cent Value Added Tax rate for gas and electricity until the end of 2030;
- Budget 2026 increased the weekly Fuel Allowance payment by €5; and
- Budget 2026 broadened the Fuel Allowance eligibility, such that an additional 50,000 working families will now be eligible for this allowance; and

further notes that:

- Ireland operates an open market economy, which generally means businesses are permitted to set and change their own prices, however, any behaviour that breaches consumer protection or competition law falls within the remit of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) and will be investigated and enforced accordingly;
- the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment has initiated the process of further strengthening the powers of the CCPC in both its consumer protection and competition functions;
- the Government's Climate Action Plan commits to halving emissions by 2030, and reaching net zero no later than 2050;
- in the long run, the best way to protect Ireland from the impact of international fossil fuel prices is to reduce our dependence on them;
- Ireland is undergoing a renewables-led energy transformation, electricity generation from renewables has increased fivefold since 2005, and the milestone of over 2 gigawatts of installed solar capacity was achieved in November;

— offshore wind capacity is also being prioritised, with the Minister for Climate, Environment and Energy and Minister for Transport, Darragh O'Brien TD, announcing the acceleration of the National Designated Maritime Area Plan for offshore renewable energy, which will identify sites for additional renewable energy development, and €3.15 billion of the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund is being provided to help achieve carbon reductions, particularly environmental and nature objectives, and this includes funding to the Department of Transport to support low-carbon transportation, and €500 million to the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment, to support climate mitigation and renewable energy development;

— home retrofitting is scaling up, with supports improving to bring more people in, especially those at risk of fuel poverty;

— analysis undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute, using the Simulating Welfare, Income Tax, Childcare and Health (SWITCH) tax and benefit model, to simulate the impact of the carbon tax and the compensatory welfare package, estimates that the net impact of the combined measures is progressive and half of households are better off due to the measures part-funded by carbon tax funds, with households in the bottom four income deciles benefitting the most; and

— the National Energy Affordability Taskforce has been established to identify, assess and implement measures that will enhance energy affordability for households and businesses, while delivering key renewable commitments and protecting security of supply and economic stability, and the Interim Report of the Taskforce was published last November, with an Action Plan for Energy Affordability to be published in Q3 of this year."

- (Tánaiste and Minister for Finance)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding energy and fuel costs. On Wednesday, 18 March 2026 on the question, "That the amendment to the motion be agreed to", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 67; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Shay.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brophy, Colm.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Browne, James.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	

Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Collins, Niall.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Connolly, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gannon, Gary.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Currie, Emer.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Daly, Martin.	Gould, Thomas.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Graves, Ann.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Hearne, Rory.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kenny, Martin.	
Foley, Norma.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Lawless, Paul.	
Grealish, Noel.	Lawlor, George.	
Harkin, Marian.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Heneghan, Barry.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Heydon, Martin.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Higgins, Emer.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Keogh, Keira.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lahart, John.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lawless, James.	Nash, Ged.	
Lowry, Michael.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Maxwell, David.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Nolan, Carol.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McGreehan, Erin.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Murphy, Michael.	Quaide, Liam.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Neville, Joe.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Sheehan, Conor.	

O'Callaghan, Jim.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

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

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 68; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Shay.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brophy, Colm.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Browne, James.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Collins, Niall.	Farrell, Mairéad.	

Connolly, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gannon, Gary.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Currie, Emer.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Daly, Martin.	Gould, Thomas.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Graves, Ann.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Hearne, Rory.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kenny, Martin.	
Foley, Norma.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Lawless, Paul.	
Grealish, Noel.	Lawlor, George.	
Harkin, Marian.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Heneghan, Barry.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Heydon, Martin.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Higgins, Emer.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Keogh, Keira.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lahart, John.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lawless, James.	Nash, Ged.	
Lowry, Michael.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Maxwell, David.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Nolan, Carol.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McGreehan, Erin.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Murphy, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Quaide, Liam.	
Neville, Joe.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		

Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

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

Question declared carried.

Structural Reform of Child Welfare Governance: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Ken O'Flynn on Thursday, 19 March 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- child protection and welfare represent one of the most fundamental constitutional obligations of the State;
- Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, operates as a statutory agency at arm's length from direct departmental control, funded by the Exchequer, but structurally separate from the Department of Children, Disability and Equality;
- this governance model has resulted in:
 - blurred lines of accountability between the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, and Tusla;
 - delays in political responsiveness; and
 - ongoing difficulty for elected representatives seeking urgent intervention in serious child welfare matters;
- over the past decade, repeated reviews and audits have highlighted:
 - delays in child protection assessments;
 - social worker recruitment and retention challenges;
 - a backlog in referrals; and
 - inconsistent case management standards;
- Tusla's Annual Report and Financial Statements 2024, confirms that:

- 451 organisations were funded under Section 56 arrangements;
- 121 additional organisations were funded through the Education Support Service; and
- a total of approximately 572 external organisations received funding in 2024;
- the scale and fragmentation of these funding arrangements raises legitimate questions regarding:
 - administrative overheads;
 - governance duplication;
 - financial transparency; and
 - strategic coherence; and
- in a number of comparable jurisdictions, child protection functions are directly embedded within Ministerial Departments, ensuring clearer democratic accountability;

acknowledges that:

- frontline social workers, and child protection professionals, perform critical and demanding work under significant pressure;
- any reform must protect service continuity and safeguard vulnerable children; and
- structural reform must be carefully phased, and evidence based; and

calls on the Government to:

- commission an independent governance review, examining the feasibility of dissolving Tusla as a separate legal entity, and transferring its statutory powers directly to the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality;
- publish, within 12 months, a White Paper outlining options to:
 - establish a child protection directorate within the Department of Children, Disability and Equality;
 - consolidate policy and operational authority;
 - streamline funding and procurement structures;
 - enhance direct Ministerial accountability;
 - develop a phased transition plan, if recommended, over a 12 to 24-month period, to ensure uninterrupted service delivery; and
 - strengthen financial oversight mechanisms, including unified budgeting and improved reporting transparency to the Oireachtas; and
- establish or reinforce an independent statutory inspectorate to ensure robust oversight under any revised governance model.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

"welcomes that:

- Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, operates as the single dedicated agency with a clear statutory remit;
- Tusla is held to account through robust governance and oversight arrangements;
- Tusla is served by well qualified staff who are committed to delivering essential child protection and welfare services to vulnerable members of society;
- staff in Tusla enjoy statutory independence, necessary for the performance of their duties in assessing and providing essential services to children and families;
- Tusla has initiated a significant integrated Reform Programme in 2026, which is:
 - promoting equity in service availability, through more equitable Regions and Areas, consistent structures and spans of control, and transparent resource allocation;
 - promoting capacity, through targeting resources where most needed, scaling capacity in line with demand, and using evidence-based data for service planning; and
 - promoting quality, through more consistent, integrated, digitally enabled services, leaner business processes, multidisciplinary teams, and a focus on face-to-face time with children and families; and
- these reforms provide for the creation of a single record for each child and young person, which will support integrated working, including a more streamlined referral and allocation system for residential care, improved communications, accurate data to improve decision making on an individual level, improved resource allocation and enhanced monitoring of performance on a local regional and organisational basis;

notes that:

- Tusla has experienced a 46 per cent increase in referrals since 2021, and a 500 per cent increase in separated children seeking international protection in Ireland since 2022;
- in the almost 12 years since its establishment, Tusla's annual budget has more than doubled, going from €609 million in 2014, to over €1.3 billion for 2026;
- Tusla has seen budget increases in most years, with significant investment annually since 2020, including a 14 per cent increase in 2026;
- the increased funding for 2026 includes a capital budget allocation of €35 million, which will be directed to increasing Tusla-owned residential care settings, including special care, thereby reducing its requirement for privately operated Special Emergency Arrangements;
- investment in recent budgets has allowed Tusla to, amongst other things:
 - increase supports to foster carers;
 - hire additional staff including social workers;

- begin to increase capacity in residential care and special care; and
- improve Internet Technology systems;
- notwithstanding the increased demands, the good work of Tusla is evidenced by:
 - the overwhelming majority of referrals to Tusla resulting in children and parents being supported in their homes;
 - 99 per cent of children in care are assigned to an allocated key worker;
 - retention of high levels of children in care who are in foster care, as 87 per cent of all children in care are in foster care;
 - the increasing number of foster parents signing up to support children;
 - the Central Statistics Office finding that approximately nine in ten children who left care since April 2018, aged 18-23 years by January 2024, were in substantial employment, enrolled in school, or in Further or Higher Education for each of the years 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022;
 - the staff retention rate is 95 per cent; and
 - innovative solutions to recruitment challenges, including its work with the Higher Education sector in developing pathways to social work and social care work, and with CORU, in developing an apprenticeship pathway; and
- so many community and voluntary groups nationwide carry out great work, funded and overseen by Tusla's Commissioned Services team, in providing essential services to vulnerable people, and this includes Family Resource Centres, counselling services and area-based childhood programmes; and

further notes that Tusla, as an organisation of over 5,000 people, was established to have a specialist management team with a deep knowledge, experience and understanding of operational service delivery in the area of social work and social care, as opposed to the Department's more general focus on advancing policy and legislation, which extends to the important areas of Disability Services, Early Learning and Care and School Age Care and Equality."

-(Minister for Children, Disability and Equality)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding flexible structural reform of child welfare governance. On Wednesday, 18 March 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the motion be agreed to", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 69; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	

Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Shay.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brophy, Colm.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Browne, James.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Collins, Niall.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Connolly, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gannon, Gary.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Currie, Emer.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Daly, Martin.	Gould, Thomas.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Graves, Ann.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Hearne, Rory.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kelly, Alan.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Foley, Norma.	Kenny, Martin.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Grealish, Noel.	Lawless, Paul.	
Harkin, Marian.	Lawlor, George.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Heneghan, Barry.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Heydon, Martin.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Higgins, Emer.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Lahart, John.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lawless, James.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lowry, Michael.	Nash, Ged.	
Maxwell, David.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Nolan, Carol.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	

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

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Michael Collins and Ken O'Flynn.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 69; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Shay.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brophy, Colm.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Browne, James.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	

Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Donnelly, Paul.	
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Cooney, Joe.	Gannon, Gary.	
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Healy-Rae, Michael.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
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Heydon, Martin.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Higgins, Emer.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
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McCarthy, Noel.	Nolan, Carol.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
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Murphy, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	

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O'Callaghan, Jim.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Sherlock, Marie.	
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O'Meara, Ryan.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Wall, Mark.	
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Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Michael Collins and Ken O'Flynn.

Question declared carried.

Cancer Services: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy David Cullinane on Tuesday, 24 March 2026:

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.

Debate resumed on 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."

- (Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy Kieran O'Donnell)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding cancer services. On Wednesday, 18 March 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the motion be agreed to", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 69; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Shay.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brophy, Colm.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Browne, James.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Donnelly, Paul.	
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Cooney, Joe.	Gannon, Gary.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Currie, Emer.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Daly, Martin.	Gould, Thomas.	

Dempsey, Aisling.	Graves, Ann.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Hearne, Rory.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kelly, Alan.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Foley, Norma.	Kenny, Martin.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Grealish, Noel.	Lawless, Paul.	
Harkin, Marian.	Lawlor, George.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Heneghan, Barry.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Heydon, Martin.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Higgins, Emer.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Lahart, John.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lawless, James.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lowry, Michael.	Nash, Ged.	
Maxwell, David.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Nolan, Carol.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McGreehan, Erin.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Murphy, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Neville, Joe.	Quaide, Liam.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.	Ward, Mark.	
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		

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

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

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 69; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
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Brophy, Colm.	Byrne, Joanna.	
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Burke, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
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Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Collins, Niall.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Connolly, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gannon, Gary.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Currie, Emer.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Daly, Martin.	Gould, Thomas.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Graves, Ann.	
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McGreehan, Erin.	O'Hara, Louis.	
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Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
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Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
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Neville, Joe.	Quaide, Liam.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Sheehan, Conor.	
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Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

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

Question declared carried.

An Garda Síochána: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Alan Kelly on Wednesday, 25 March 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- there are still fewer serving members of An Garda Síochána in 2026, compared to six years ago, with 14,187 available members at the end of January 2026, in contrast to 14,235 members in 2020;
- accounting for population growth, this fall in numbers means that there are now 10 per cent fewer Gardaí per capita than there were five years ago;
- the Programme for Government committed to recruiting at least 5,000 new Garda recruits and additional Garda staff by 2030;
- trainee intakes remain far too low to achieve adequate policing levels, with just 619 Gardaí attesting from Templemore in 2025;
- during 2025, 29 per cent of Garda Divisions, and 46 per cent of Garda Districts, either lost Garda members or saw no change in numbers;
- the numbers of Gardaí unavailable due to suspension has rapidly increased in recent years, with 107 Gardaí suspended at the end of 2025, versus just 39 in December 2018;
- over 2025, the number of Community Gardaí fell from 700 to 615; and
- there were just 308 Garda Reserve members as of 31st January, 2026, down from 1,164 in 2013;

recognises that:

- over a year since the formation of the new Government, no new plan has been put in place to increase Garda recruitment and expand the size of the force, in line with public commitments;
- morale within the force was severely damaged under the tenure of the previous Garda Commissioner, with the high-profile mistreatment of serving members, and a steady trend of Gardaí leaving the force or retiring early;
- serious questions remain about the conduct of the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation and senior Garda leadership towards serving members in the Limerick region, and in the Garda bike loan case;
- further serious questions remain unanswered about the procurement and use of inappropriate gun holsters, and the storage of firearms, live scan fingerprints, drugs and cash at Garda Headquarters; and
- the Government failed to declare, over seven years, that the previous Garda Commissioner was provided with rent free accommodation through the Office of Public

Works, that underwent €400,000 worth of renovations before being made available in 2018;

further notes that:

- the then Garda Commissioner, Drew Harris, appeared before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport and Communications in May 2024, and stated that an additional 150 Gardaí would be allocated to Roads Policing over 2024 and 2025;
- on 31st December, 2023, there were 632 Gardaí allocated to Roads Policing, while on 31st December, 2025, there were 647 Gardaí allocated to Roads Policing, an increase of just 15 members, or 10 per cent of the Commissioner's stated aim;
- 40 per cent of the Garda vehicles fleet is over six years old;
- significant concerns have been raised regarding the impact of the new Garda Operating Model (GOM) implemented from 2019 onwards, which breaks the link between Gardaí and local communities, in particular in rural areas;
- in response to an Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors survey in 2025, 90 per cent of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors indicated that high visibility policing has not increased since the introduction of the GOM, and that the GOM is "unsuitable for rural policing", while 98 per cent of respondents called for an urgent review of the GOM; and
- the Policing and Community Safety Authority assessment of An Garda Síochána's policing performance throughout the first half of 2025, found that 11 of 18 performance indicators were "at risk";

acknowledges:

- the crucial role played by An Garda Síochána in protecting and serving communities across Ireland;
- the critical importance of a locally embedded, well-resourced, modern police service, in enabling communities to flourish;
- the crisis of low morale that has been allowed to develop among rank-and-file Gardaí under successive governments, due to consistent under-resourcing and a failing operational policing model, and the impact that crisis has on the ability of An Garda Síochána to perform its critical functions; and
- that selective internal investigations within An Garda Síochána have been weaponised against members of the force who raise legitimate concerns, submit protected disclosures or act as whistleblowers;

calls on the Government to initiate a public inquiry into the conduct of internal Garda investigations during, and subsequent to, the tenure of the former Garda Commissioner, Drew Harris; and

in order to address recruitment shortfalls, improve morale, and strengthen policing in Ireland, further calls on the Government to:

- urgently publish a funded plan to ensure at least 1,000 new Gardaí are trained every year;
- review the current GOM, and where it is not consistent with effective rural and community policing, to halt its implementation;
- enhance the community policing model to standardise rostering in line with other Gardaí, introduce appropriate promotional opportunities, and increase the use of pedal cycles in urban community policing;
- increase the Garda training allowance to the equivalent of a starting salary, and review pay and pension issues for serving staff;
- provide each Garda District and the communities living there with a clear timeline of when increased numbers of Gardaí will be deployed to address safety concerns and anti-social behaviour, and roll out domestic abuse coordination teams across every region;
- commit to a measurable plan to increase roads policing, and invest in the vehicle fleet and Garda equipment;
- invest in expanding Templemore Training College and the Garda lands and facilities at Dromard, Clonmore, to ensure at least 1,000 new recruits are trained per year; and
- introduce an occupational supplementary pension to the Single Public Service Pension Scheme, as a key retention measure for uniformed service personnel.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

"recognises:

- the crucial role played by An Garda Síochána in ensuring the security of the State, protecting and serving communities across Ireland through the maintenance of law and order, and upholding the principles of justice;
- the commencement of the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024, in April 2025, providing an extensive new framework for policing and community safety in Ireland, and the subsequent establishment of new bodies critical to the governance and delivery of policing services by An Garda Síochána;
- that Central Statistics Office data shows a decrease in the majority of offence groups in the year to September 2025, the latest period for which data is available;
- that, in particular, homicide and related offences fell by 25 per cent, reflecting, in particular, the significant success of An Garda Síochána in combatting organised crime groups;
- that robbery, extortion and hijacking offences fell by 13 per cent in the same period;
- that burglary and related offences fell by 12 per cent, reflecting the continued evidence-based success of Operation Thor by An Garda Síochána;

— the critical importance of a visible, locally embedded, well-resourced, modern police service in building stronger, safer communities, supporting community wellbeing and enabling them to flourish;

— that, through the promotion of crime prevention and visible policing, An Garda Síochána foster a sense of security, especially among the most vulnerable in our society;

— that our communities rely on the Gardaí to respond to emergency calls, patrol our neighbourhoods, prevent, detect and investigate crimes;

— that An Garda Síochána play an important role in the recently established Community Safety Partnerships, 35 of which are established and operational around the country;

— that overall funding for An Garda Síochána has increased by almost 50 per cent since 2020, with investment of over €2.74 billion for 2026;

— that through successive budget increases the Government has ensured that An Garda Síochána has the resources, leadership and technology to deliver on its mission;

— that a major capital plan is being implemented, including the construction of Divisional Headquarters in Clonmel and Macroom; and

— that €69 million has been allocated to further expand and modernise the Garda fleet over the next five years, which represents a 38 per cent increase on the allocation for the previous five years;

further recognises that:

— in line with Programme for Government commitments, the Garda Training Review Group is working to identify delivery options to increase the scale and capacity of high-quality education, training and continuous professional development in An Garda Síochána, and this will help ensure that the skills needs of the organisation are met over the next decade;

— the proportion of Garda resignations remains very low, with the resignation rate currently between 1 and 2 per cent;

— significant measures have been taken to boost recruitment and retention in recent years, including increasing the Garda trainee allowance to €354 per week, increasing the age of entry from 35 to 50, and raising the mandatory retirement age to 62;

— the vast majority of Gardaí serve with integrity and work tirelessly to keep our communities safe;

— the Garda Commissioner is committed to ensuring the highest levels of integrity are maintained across the organisation, and that there are robust procedures in place under the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024, to allow him to deal with any allegations of misconduct;

— the introduction of a modernised statutory disciplinary framework under the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024, will help to ensure more timely resolution of conduct proceedings and cases involving Garda suspensions;

- statutory Standards of Professional Behaviour and associated Conduct Regulations now provide clear mechanisms to examine allegations concerning the conduct of Garda members; and

- significant and sustained investment in equipment for Gardaí is delivering real benefits, including through the rollout of mobility devices to all frontline members, the rollout of body-worn cameras, the acquisition of two water cannons, the expansion of the fleet and the purchase of three new state-of-the-art aircraft;

welcomes that:

- there are 14,529 attested Gardaí serving with An Garda Síochána as of end February 2026, reflecting that Garda recruitment is now accelerating following the forced closure of the Garda College during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, and subsequent alterations to training as the pandemic continued;

- this represents an increase of almost 1,500 Garda members since 2016;

- the overall Garda workforce has increased from 15,980 in 2016 to 18,276 in 2026;

- the Government has committed in the Programme for Government to funding the recruitment of 5,000 Gardaí and additional Garda staff by 2030;

- interest in a career in An Garda Síochána is high, with almost 11,000 applications to join the Service received in 2025;

- 223 Garda Trainees entered the Garda Training College in Templemore in November 2025, the largest single intake to the Garda College since 2014, and overall, 794 trainees entered the Garda College in 2025, the highest number since 2018;

- a further 215 Garda Trainees entered the Garda Training College in February 2026, with three further intakes planned across the remainder of the year;

- 194 Gardai attested in November 2025, the highest number since 2019;

- the Government is committed to increasing the Garda Reserve with a recruitment competition planned for 2026, and further intakes planned this year; and

- the introduction of the Garda Operating Model, which makes Garda Divisions the central unit of policing administration, has provided for a more comprehensive and inclusive policing service and helped strengthen the focus on community policing, while also introducing increased local specialisation in the investigation of a range of crimes, including sexual crime, domestic violence, cyber-crime, and economic crime; and

notes the Government's commitment to:

- continue to invest in ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the resources it needs to keep people safe;

- support the Garda Commissioner in ensuring the wellbeing and job satisfaction of the members and staff of An Garda Síochána;

- continue to provide funding to recruit 5,000 new Gardaí over the next five years;

— modernise the statutory basis for certain Garda powers, through the enactment of the Garda Síochána (Powers) Bill 2026;

— further enhance the detection and investigation capabilities of An Garda Síochána, through the enactment of the Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) (Amendment) Bill 2025, which builds on the Garda Síochána's ability to use body-worn cameras, enabled through the Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) Act 2023;

— continue to invest in additional measures to support the Garda College to increase capacity for up to 1,000 Garda Trainees per year, including those detailed in the An Garda Síochána Recruitment Training Capacity Group Report, published in September 2025; and

— continue to support the work being done by An Garda Síochána with international partners to deal with organised crime gangs and the related issue of drugs in our communities.".

- (Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding An Garda Síochána. On Wednesday, 25 March 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the motion be agreed to", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 69; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Shay.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brophy, Colm.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Browne, James.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Mícheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Collins, Niall.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Connolly, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	

Cooney, Joe.	Gannon, Gary.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Currie, Emer.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Daly, Martin.	Gould, Thomas.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Graves, Ann.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Hearne, Rory.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kelly, Alan.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Foley, Norma.	Kenny, Martin.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Grealish, Noel.	Lawless, Paul.	
Harkin, Marian.	Lawlor, George.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Heneghan, Barry.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Heydon, Martin.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Higgins, Emer.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Lahart, John.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lawless, James.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lowry, Michael.	Nash, Ged.	
Maxwell, David.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Nolan, Carol.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McGreehan, Erin.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Murphy, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Neville, Joe.	Quaide, Liam.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.	Ward, Mark.	
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
Ó Fearghail, Seán.		

Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Alan Kelly and Conor Sheehan.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 69; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Shay.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brophy, Colm.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Browne, James.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Collins, Niall.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gannon, Gary.	
Currie, Emer.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Daly, Martin.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Gould, Thomas.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Graves, Ann.	
Dillon, Alan.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dolan, Albert.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Hearne, Rory.	

Feighan, Frankie.	Kelly, Alan.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Foley, Norma.	Kenny, Martin.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Grealish, Noel.	Lawless, Paul.	
Harkin, Marian.	Lawlor, George.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Heneghan, Barry.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Heydon, Martin.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Higgins, Emer.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Lahart, John.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lawless, James.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lowry, Michael.	Nash, Ged.	
Maxwell, David.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Nolan, Carol.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McGreehan, Erin.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Murphy, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Neville, Joe.	Quaide, Liam.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.	Ward, Mark.	
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
Ó Feargháil, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		

Ward, Barry.		
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Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Alan Kelly and Conor Sheehan.

Question declared carried.

Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 (Section 4(2)) (Scheme Termination Date) Order 2026: Motion (Resumed)

The following motion was moved by the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, Deputy Colm Brophy, on Wednesday, 25 March 2026:

That Dáil Éireann approves the following Order in draft:

Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 (Section 4(2)) (Scheme Termination Date) Order 2026,

a copy of which was laid in draft form before Dáil Éireann on 23rd February, 2026.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

To insert the following after "23rd February, 2026":

", provided that this Order shall take effect only after the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 has been amended to provide for the Accommodation Recognition Payment (ARP) scheme termination date to be extended, only for the following:

- existing recipients, with respect to the beneficiaries of temporary protection currently benefitting from the scheme, where those beneficiaries of temporary protection have satisfied a means test, similar to those applicable for other housing assistance payments;
- new applications, who propose to host a beneficiary of temporary protection in their property, which is also their own primary residence, and who have not availed of the Rent-a-Room Relief scheme in the previous 24 months, ensuring that the ARP does not further distort the rental sector; and
- recipients who are not in receipt of any additional or 'top-up' payments from a beneficiary of temporary protection."

(Deputy Matt Carthy)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 (Section 4(2)) (Scheme Termination Date) Order 2026. On Wednesday, 25 March 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the motion be agreed to", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 45; Níl, 103; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon

Bennett, Cathy.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Brady, John.	Aird, William.	
Buckley, Pat.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Carthy, Matt.	Boland, Grace.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Collins, Michael.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Brennan, Brian.	
Cronin, Réada.	Brennan, Shay.	
Crowe, Seán.	Brophy, Colm.	
Cullinane, David.	Browne, James.	
Daly, Pa.	Burke, Colm.	
Devine, Máire.	Burke, Peter.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Butler, Mary.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Gould, Thomas.	Cahill, Michael.	
Graves, Ann.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Calleary, Dara.	
Kenny, Martin.	Canney, Seán.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Lawless, Paul.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Collins, Niall.	
McDonald, Mary Lou.	Cooney, Joe.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Cummins, Jen.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Currie, Emer.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Daly, Martin.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Nolan, Carol.	Devlin, Cormac.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	Dillon, Alan.	
O'Hara, Louis.	Dolan, Albert.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	Dooley, Timmy.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Fleming, Sean.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	Foley, Norma.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Gannon, Gary.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Stanley, Brian.	Grealish, Noel.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	Harkin, Marian.	
Ward, Mark.	Hayes, Eoin.	
	Healy-Rae, Michael.	
	Hearne, Rory.	
	Heneghan, Barry.	

	Heydon, Martin.	
	Higgins, Emer.	
	Kelly, Alan.	
	Kenny, Eoghan.	
	Keogh, Keira.	
	Lahart, John.	
	Lawless, James.	
	Lawlor, George.	
	Lowry, Michael.	
	Maxwell, David.	
	McAuliffe, Paul.	
	McCarthy, Noel.	
	McConalogue, Charlie.	
	McCormack, Tony.	
	McEntee, Helen.	
	McGrath, Séamus.	
	McGreehan, Erin.	
	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
	Moynihan, Michael.	
	Moynihan, Shane.	
	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
	Murphy, Michael.	
	Murphy, Paul.	
	Nash, Ged.	
	Naughton, Hildegard.	
	Neville, Joe.	
	O'Brien, Darragh.	
	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
	O'Connell, Maeve.	
	O'Dea, Willie.	
	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghail, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Quaide, Liam.	
	Rice, Pádraig.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Sheehan, Conor.	
	Sherlock, Marie.	
	Smith, Brendan.	

	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Wall, Mark.	
	Ward, Barry.	
	Whitmore, Jennifer.	

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

Amendment declared lost.

Question put: "That the motion be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 101; Níl, 45; 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.	Collins, Michael.	
Brennan, Brian.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Brennan, Shay.	Cronin, Réada.	
Brophy, Colm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Browne, James.	Cullinane, David.	
Burke, Colm.	Daly, Pa.	
Burke, Peter.	Devine, Máire.	
Butler, Mary.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Cahill, Michael.	Gould, Thomas.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Graves, Ann.	
Calleary, Dara.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Canney, Seán.	Kenny, Martin.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Lawless, Paul.	
Collins, Niall.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Cooney, Joe.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Crowe, Cathal.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Cummins, Jen.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Currie, Emer.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Daly, Martin.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Nolan, Carol.	

Dillon, Alan.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
Dolan, Albert.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Dooley, Timmy.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Feighan, Frankie.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Fleming, Sean.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Foley, Norma.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Gannon, Gary.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Grealish, Noel.	Stanley, Brian.	
Harkin, Marian.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Ward, Mark.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.		
Hearne, Rory.		
Heneghan, Barry.		
Heydon, Martin.		
Higgins, Emer.		
Kelly, Alan.		
Kenny, Eoghan.		
Keogh, Keira.		
Lahart, John.		
Lawless, James.		
Lawlor, George.		
Lowry, Michael.		
Maxwell, David.		
McAuliffe, Paul.		
McCarthy, Noel.		
McCormack, Tony.		
McEntee, Helen.		
McGrath, Séamus.		
McGreehan, Erin.		
Moran, Kevin Boxer.		
Moynihan, Aindrias.		
Moynihan, Michael.		
Moynihan, Shane.		
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.		
Murphy, Michael.		
Murphy, Paul.		
Nash, Ged.		
Naughton, Hildegard.		
Neville, Joe.		
O'Brien, Darragh.		
O'Callaghan, Cian.		
O'Callaghan, Jim.		
O'Connell, Maeve.		
O'Dea, Willie.		
O'Donnell, Kieran.		

O'Donoghue, Robert.		
O'Gorman, Roderic.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Quaide, Liam.		
Rice, Pádraig.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Sheehan, Conor.		
Sherlock, Marie.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Wall, Mark.		
Ward, Barry.		
Whitmore, Jennifer.		

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

Question declared carried.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 9.11 p.m. go dtí 8.47 a.m., Déardaoin, an 26 Márta 2026.

The Dáil adjourned at 9.11 p.m. until 8.47 a.m. on Thursday, 26 March 2026.