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Tuesday,
14 April 2026

DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—Neamhcheartaithe
(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 14 Aibreán 2026

Tuesday, 14 April 2026

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

Paidir agus Machnamh.

Prayer and Reflection.

Gnó na Dála - Business of Dáil

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Members to remain standing. I want to make a short announcement. I would like to acknowledge the recent loss of two distinguished former Cinn Chomhairle of Dáil Éireann, Mr. Rory O'Hanlon and Mr. Seán Barrett. I would like to advise Members that expressions of sympathy from party and group leaders will be arranged in the coming weeks. At this juncture, on behalf of the Houses of the Oireachtas, I extend our heartfelt sympathy to their families, friends and colleagues who feel their loss most deeply. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha dílse.

An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business

An Ceann Comhairle: In accordance with Standing Order 35 I must now call on the Chief Whip, Deputy Butler, to move the arrangements for this week's business.

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

Tuesday's business shall be:

- Motion *re* Confidence in the Government (*not to exceed 2 hours and 25 minutes; any division claimed to be taken by roll-call*)
- Financial Motions by the Minister for Finance [2026] (Financial Resolution Nos. 1, 2 and 3) (*three separate motions to be debated together and brought to a conclusion within 60 mins, with separate questions put on each motion and any divisions claimed to be taken immediately*)
- Critical Infrastructure Bill 2026 (Second Stage) (*to conclude at the end of the first speaking round; not to exceed 3 hours and 34 minutes*)

Tuesday's private members' business shall be the Motion *re* Fuel Prices, selected by Sinn Féin.

Wednesday's business shall be:

- Motion *re* Ministerial Rota for Parliamentary Questions (1) (*without debate and any division claimed to be taken immediately*)
- Motion *re* Ministerial Rota for Parliamentary Questions (2) (*without debate and any division claimed to be taken immediately*)
- Motion *re* Tenth Report of the Standing Committee of Selection (*without debate and any division claimed to be taken immediately*)
- International Protection Bill 2026 (Amendments from the Seanad) (*to conclude within 3 hours*)
- Statements on Football (*to be taken no earlier than 5 p.m. and to conclude within 3 hours and 32 minutes*)
- Arbitration (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Report and Final Stages) (*to conclude within 1 hour*)

Wednesday's private members' business shall be the Motion *re* Tackling Soaring Energy Costs, selected by Social Democrats.

Thursday's business shall be:

- Air Pollution (Amendment) Bill 2025 [*Seanad*] (Second Stage) (*if not previously concluded, to adjourn at the end of the first speaking round; not to exceed 3 hours and 34 minutes*)

Thursday evening business shall be the Second Stage of the Disregard of Historic Offences for Consensual Sexual Activity Between Men Bill 2025, sponsored by Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh.

Proposed Arrangements for this week's business:

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

1. notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders:
 - (a) the Order of Business shall be taken immediately;
 - (b) Leaders Questions and Questions on Policy or Legislation pursuant to Standing Orders 36 and 38 shall not be taken and the rota for Leaders Questions for this week shall be unaffected by that change;
 - (c) Oral Parliamentary Questions to the Taoiseach pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) shall not be taken;
 - (d) the Motion *re* Confidence in the Government shall be taken immediately following the Order of Business;

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

(f) private members business may be taken earlier than 6.12 p.m. and shall in any event be taken on the conclusion of the Financial Motions by the Minister for Finance [2026] (Financial Resolution Nos. 1, 2 and 3);

(g) Second Stage of the Critical Infrastructure Bill 2026 shall be taken on conclusion of private members business;

(h) Parliamentary Questions to a Minister other than the Taoiseach pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) shall not be taken; and

(i) topical issues pursuant to Standing Order 39 which were to be taken on Tuesday, shall be taken on Thursday, 23rd April, 2026, and the Dáil shall adjourn on the conclusion of proceedings on the Critical Infrastructure Bill 2026;

2. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Confidence in the Government shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 2 hours and 25 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply thereto:

(a) the arrangements for the speeches shall be in accordance with those contained in the table immediately below (to be read across);

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

(c) members may share time; and

(d) any division claimed thereon shall be taken immediately;

	Gov	SF	Lab	Gov	SF
Mins	25	15	10	10	3
	SD	Gov	SF	IPTG	Gov
Mins	10	10	3	9	10
	SF	ITG	Gov	SF	OM
Mins	3	9	10	3	5
Total: 2 hours and 15 mins					

3. notwithstanding anything in Standing Order 217, in relation to the Financial Motions by the Minister for Finance [2026] (Financial Resolutions Nos. 1, 2 and 3), the following arrangements shall apply:

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

(b) the three motions shall be debated together, with separate questions put from the Chair on each motion: Provided that where any amendment is not disposed of within the 60 minutes, the question on each motion shall also dispose of any amendments tabled to that motion;

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

- opening speech by a Minister or Minister of State – 10 minutes;
- speeches by representatives of Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, Social Democrats, Independent and Parties Technical Group, and Independent Technical Group – 7.5 minutes per party or group;
- speeches by Other Members – 7.5 minutes; and
- a speech in response by the Minister – 5 minutes;

(d) members may share time; and

(e) any divisions demanded shall be taken immediately; and

4. the proceedings on the Critical Infrastructure Bill 2026 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 3 hours and 34 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply thereto:

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

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

(c) members may share time.

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

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

1. notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders:

(a) the SOS pursuant to Standing Order 25(1) shall be taken immediately following Taoiseach's Oral Parliamentary Questions pursuant to Standing Order 47(1), which shall be taken at the time when the SOS would normally be taken;

(b) any motions without debate shall be taken immediately following the SOS pursuant to Standing Order 25(1)

(c) in the event proceedings on the International Protection Bill 2026 conclude before 5 p.m., the sitting shall stand suspended until 5 p.m. when the order of business shall resume with the Statements on Football; and

(d) the time allotted for Government Business shall be extended in accordance with the arrangements for that business, with consequential effect on the commencement time for the weekly division time, which may be taken on the conclusion of proceedings on the Arbitration (Amendment) Bill 2025, and the Dáil shall adjourn on the conclusion of the weekly division time;

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

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

4. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Tenth Report of the Standing Committee of Selection shall be taken without debate and any division claimed thereon shall be taken immediately;

5. the proceedings on the amendments from the Seanad to the International Protection Bill 2026 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 3 hours, and any amendments from the Seanad not disposed of shall be decided by one question which shall be put from the Chair, and which shall, in relation to amendments to the Seanad amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration

6. the Statements on Football shall be taken either at 5 p.m. or on the conclusion of the International Protection Bill 2026, whichever is the later, and shall not exceed 3 hours and 32 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply:

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

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

(c) members may share time; and

	Gov	SF	Lab	Gov	SF
Mins	35	25	15	15	5
	SD	Gov	SF	IPTG	Gov
Mins	15	15	5	12	15
	SF	ITG	Gov	SF	OM
Mins	5	12	15	5	8
Total: 3 hours and 22 mins					

7. the proceedings on Report and Final Stages of the Arbitration (Amendment) Bill 2025 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 1 hour by one question, which shall be put from the Chair, and which shall, in relation to amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

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

1. notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, topical issues may be taken earlier than 7.24 p.m. with consequential effect on the commencement time for Second Stage of the Disregard of Historic Offences for Consensual Sexual Activity Between Men Bill 2025, and on the time for the adjournment of the Dáil; and

2. the proceedings on the Second Stage of the Air Pollution (Amendment) Bill 2025 [*Seanad*] shall, if not previously concluded, be interrupted and stand adjourned at the end of the first speaking round and the following arrangements shall apply:

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

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

(c) members may share time.

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

An Ceann Comhairle: Are the proposed arrangements agreed to?

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Not agreed.

An Ceann Comhairle: They are not agreed. As per usual, each Member indicates. I call Deputy Mac Lochlainn.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Absolutely not agreed. It has been three weeks now since the Taoiseach was accountable to these Houses - 20 days this Dáil did not sit and he would not reconvene the Dáil when we asked him to deal with this crisis, to have this place sitting. He would not do it. Arrogance and entitlement seems to be the mentality here of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Will the Taoiseach start listening, will he do his job and will he stick with the original schedule and take Leaders' Questions, Questions on Policy or Legislation and Taoiseach's Questions today?

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Will he just do his job?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Smith.

Deputy Duncan Smith: It is unacceptable, after three weeks, that the Taoiseach is not having Leaders' Questions, Taoiseach's Questions or Questions on Policy or Legislation when we need scrutiny more than ever, given what we have had over the past week. It is utterly unacceptable. It is absolutely unprecedented that all we are going to have today is a proper spectacle when we should be having accountability.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: The country was brought to the brink last week and it is extraordinary that the Taoiseach will not answer questions today after the Dáil being in recess for three weeks. Why will the Taoiseach not take questions from TDs and party leaders in the Dáil today? Why does he think that is a good precedent to set? Has he learned nothing from the past week and from the mishandling of it in terms of the need for accountability and listening to people?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The Dáil agenda has been obliterated to minimise the Opposition's chance to question the Taoiseach about what happened last week, his inept and arrogant handling of the protests and also to debate the package of measures that his Government brought in.

We all feel huge sympathy for the Healy-Raes. I do not know if Danny is back from the top of a tractor somewhere. We all feel for the suffering of Michael having to resist the temptation to join him. We have an absolute obligation on behalf of the workers and the disabled to question why the Government has not brought forward one single measure to deal with the suffering people are feeling around the country.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy. Your time is up. I call Deputy Michael Collins.

Deputy Michael Collins: Eighteen days ago the Irish Haulage Farming Construction Contractors Amalgamation, IHFCCA, wrote to the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and every Minister in this country outlining the crisis that we had and asking them to speak with it. The Government refused to speak with it. A few days later Independent Ireland asked to reconvene the Dáil and the Taoiseach refused to speak with us. Now the Taoiseach is here today saying he will not take Taoiseach's questions or Questions on Policy or Legislation. What is wrong?

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy Collins.

Deputy Michael Collins: What is the silence about this? It is time to speak out and give us our opportunity to ask questions about the disgrace that went on in the past week.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Chief Whip to respond.

Deputy Mary Butler: When the Dáil schedule was circulated last September nobody in the House objected to it. This is the first point.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the answer.

Deputy Mary Butler: It is normal practice for the Government to put forward a motion of confidence when a motion of no confidence is tabled by the Opposition. It is important that this happens at the earliest opportunity. It supersedes all other business so that the Dáil has the opportunity to express its confidence in the Government and get on with the important business.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: On a point of order.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no point of order until the Chief Whip has finished speaking.

Deputy Mary Butler: This will then be followed by the financial resolutions to underpin the significant package of supports announced by the Government on Sunday so these important reliefs are implemented immediately. The Order of Business stands.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: To be very clear the record needs to be corrected. Leaders' Questions were not scrapped previously. Taoiseach's questions were not scrapped previously. Questions on Policy or Legislation were not scrapped previously.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, I am going to ask you-----

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: It is completely untrue to say this is normal.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am standing and I ask Deputy Mac Lochlainn to resume his seat.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: This is not normal.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, resume your seat. I will put the question and the procedure will carry on.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: This is immunity from accountability.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy cannot resume his seat and respect the Chair, we will move the proceedings on. Are the proposed arrangements for the week's business agreed to?

Deputies: Not agreed.

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

The Dáil divided: Tá, 93; Níl, 74; 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.	Cairns, Holly.	
Burke, Colm.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Peter.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Butler, Mary.	Collins, Michael.	
Butterly, Paula.	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.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Chambers, Jack.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Clendennen, John.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Collins, Niall.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Connolly, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gould, Thomas.	
Cummins, John.	Graves, Ann.	
Currie, Emer.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Daly, Martin.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Kenny, Martin.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawless, Paul.	
Foley, Norma.	Lawlor, George.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Geoghegan, James.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Grealish, Noel.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Harkin, Marian.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Harris, Simon.	Murphy, Paul.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Heydon, Martin.	Nash, Ged.	
Higgins, Emer.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Keogh, Keira.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lahart, John.	Nolan, Carol.	
Lawless, James.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Lowry, Michael.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	

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

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

Question declared carried.

Confidence in Government: Motion

An Ceann Comhairle: This is a very important debate for the public looking in at proceedings. I will briefly outline how the debate will proceed for their benefit. Speaking times have been agreed by the House and are displayed on the clock. If the clock turns red, a Member's time is up. When a Member rises, their time begins. Where time is shared, the Chair will indicate this. All contributions must be made through the Chair. These arrangements are governed by the rules of the House. As Ceann Comhairle, I am obliged to implement them. Equally, all Members are obliged to comply with these rules. I ask that they do so. Every Member speaking is entitled to a fair hearing. Our constituents expect that this debate will be conducted in a respectful manner, and I ask that all Members co-operate.

I call on the Taoiseach to move the motion. He will be sharing time with the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance and the Minister of State, Deputy Canney.

The Taoiseach: I move:

That Dáil Éireann reaffirms its confidence in the Government.

I welcome this debate and the opportunity to again discuss important issues facing our people. Each of us here has a mandate and a duty to show respect for others and conduct a debate that shows respect for the people by acknowledging the full range of concerns at this deeply challenging moment in history. We need to talk about the huge impact of rising oil prices, but also the wider context of protecting jobs, funding services, investing to get costs down and getting Ireland through a period of international turmoil.

Wars and a pandemic have led to sustained pressure on costs faced by families and businesses for nearly five years. The Government has had to act on a wide range of fronts, including securing basic supplies. There are structural issues which have to be addressed. I will be happy to return to the Dáil to discuss our investment plans for permanently reducing the upward pressure on key costs, especially energy costs.

I welcome an honest debate about getting electricity prices permanently down in international terms. The House will note a report published this morning which explicitly states that since 2022, Government measures have shielded consumers considerably. However, today I will focus on the immediate issue of recent major increases in costs arising from rising oil prices. The Opposition claims that nothing has been done to help people, that other countries are helping more and that the Government could easily sort out everything. This is manifestly untrue and directly ignores the fact that we are implementing significant action, that it goes beyond anything being done elsewhere and that the core concern pushing up oil prices is an international conflict, namely war in the Middle East between the US, Israel and Iran.

From the first days of this latest conflict, we have been directly taking action to reduce the impact on Ireland and have held ongoing discussions with representatives of the full range of groups impacted. The first intervention we implemented last month helped by cutting duties, benefiting everyone, and directly helping families. It amounted to €250 million.

The latest measures go further and are based on detailed discussions with different sectors about their specific needs and they are designed to very directly help protect jobs and keep

costs down. At €500 million, it is a comprehensive package. It is not about helping special interest groups. We all depend on transport, food production, haulage, fisheries and other fuel-intensive industries. That is why we are implementing specific measures tailored to these critical areas. These reflect the ongoing open and constructive discussions and interaction we have had with representative bodies.

I will not attempt to address all of the false claims by Opposition Deputies but I will reply to a clearly untrue statement by Deputy Carthy. He claimed the Irish Government is the biggest profiteer - his words - on oil prices and that budget coffers were being swelled. The Deputy is intelligent enough and has enough access to research to know this is flat out untrue. As the publicly available facts show, the Government is already spending dramatically more on measures to help people with fuel costs than it is receiving in extra taxes. Before today, the measures provided by Government was costing close to €28 million a week while the additional revenue has averaged €4 million.

Our actions also amount to proportionately the largest assistance package of any European country. The closest any country comes is Spain, where the support package is over one quarter smaller. The packages in Germany and Poland are roughly 90% lower than the supports we are implementing. As for Northern Ireland, the actions taken by the Executive and the British Government combined are a fraction of what we are implementing. The basic, core claim that we are doing nothing and are falling behind other countries is simply untrue.

One thing the Opposition never does is respect the fact that we have to fund social services and investments. We have to secure basic energy and food supplies and keep open trade and exports - exports which are responsible for 90% of what we produce in any one year. We have to protect our ability to overcome new shocks which may arise. The measures we are implementing involve a very significant amount of public resources and directly support those being hit by the shock of increasing world fuel prices. They go further than other governments and combine both general and targeted assistance. As I have said, I am happy to return to the House to discuss prices in general and action on affordability. A combination of immediate and long-term actions is required but any politician here who pretends there are no hard choices to be made is being dishonest, and they know it. What the people have a right to is sustainable supports, combined with sustained action, to tackle the structural drivers of rising costs. This has to be the focus.

Today, it is of course important to address events of the past week. Our action and engagement on fuel prices was ongoing before the blockade and will continue well after the blockade. This is a country which ranks in the top ten in the world for freedom of speech, the right to protest and the right of democratic participation. Every week, the streets outside of Leinster House are filled with groups passionately advocating for their cause. People speak up looking for funding for local services, special education supports, childcare, disability services, pensions and many other political, environmental and social issues. These demonstrations often involve closing roads in co-ordination with An Garda Síochána. The general public and businesses accept the inconvenience as part of what comes with living in an active democracy. The blockade of critical infrastructure of last week went far beyond this. It was a destructive blockade which threatened to cause much deeper damage.

Everybody has a right to protest but nobody has a right to appoint themselves as the voice of the people and to threaten the jobs and livelihoods of many thousands of families. Nobody

has the right to prevent people from getting to cancer treatment, to be visited by their carer or to distribute vital supplies. The House needs to face up to the fact that these actions were very directly threatening the basic fuel supplies of the country. This went far beyond the drying up of fuel pumps which people saw throughout the country. We were informed in Government that our only refinery was in danger of being closed and export-dependent companies were about to start sending workers home. The ports and refinery blockade meant that at the very time when global supplies are scarce, oil intended for Ireland was about to be diverted elsewhere.

I absolutely understand the pressures people feel and the need for measures to reduce the impact of rising oil prices. That said, no group has the right to say to the rest of the country that it will decide who gets fuel to go to work or who gets fuel in general or that it will block Irish firms from exporting the goods which pay workers' wages.

No action by the Government was taken in haste. Time was given for people to make their point, but action was required and was taken. Gardaí acted with the utmost professionalism under often extreme pressure, and with the specialist support of the Army, lifted the blockades. I thank them again for their work. I also thank the officials and Ministers in various Departments who worked tirelessly to make sure that essential services, particularly health services, remained available in the face of extreme challenges.

There is another deeply important point arising from recent weeks concerning the nature of political behaviour in our country. There are many extreme groups which claim to speak on behalf of the people without ever securing the support of the people. It is standard practice for people to shout in the streets and online that they are the real people of Ireland and that the Dáil and the Government are a non-representative elite who know nothing and care less about this country. Parliamentary democracy is something we should all affirm and defend. The great majority of people who have protested have done so reasonably and democratically. We all saw that this was not the case for some other elements. Everyone here should understand that you cannot share platforms with them, express your support for them, call them the voice of the people and then deny your responsibility for legitimising them. I condemn utterly the sinister targeting of gardaí and of oil lorry drivers. I have told the Garda Commissioner that we will fully support his efforts to find and prosecute those involved. I also condemn the direct and indirect threats to Deputies and Ministers. The online threats against homes and offices should be condemned by everyone here. We should all be concerned with the attempts to import extreme ideologies here, something we saw with the number of online social media accounts which originated in America, Britain and elsewhere and which were spreading inflammatory comments about the blockade. In reality, we are in a period of dramatically escalating angry rhetoric in politics. The escalating rhetoric of Opposition here too is unprecedented.

The Government has a clear democratic mandate. We have an ambitious programme for investment and services to support people and protect our country.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you. The Tánaiste, please.

The Taoiseach: On this issue and on the fundamental challenge of getting our country through a period of deep and rapidly evolving international challenges, I can say that as Taoiseach and as a Government-----

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Time is up.

The Taoiseach: -----we are clear-sighted, resolute and determined to do what we need to do to protect and defend our social and economic progress.

The Tánaiste: I join with the Taoiseach in moving this motion of confidence in the Government. This Government came together to form a stable majority with a clear mission to work hard to build a secure and prosperous future for the people of this country across five budgets. We are guided by that mission today as much as we were on the day we took office.

Let me be direct about what is actually happening here. Sinn Féin decided to table a motion of no confidence before it even saw the details of the Government's package of supports. It is a package of supports which, factually, is far more comprehensive and strategically responsive than anything its members have proposed or are working on in the Northern Ireland Executive. Were Sinn Féin's motion to tear down this Government successful, the financial resolutions which we will pass in this House later this evening would fall away and the measures we agreed on behalf of the Irish people over the weekend to try to help hard-pressed people - the very same people Sinn Féin purports to represent - would not take effect. In other words, the motion of no confidence was just another one of its stunts.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Threats do not work.

The Tánaiste: In the cold light of day, people know that.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: You are so out of touch.

An Ceann Comhairle: A fair hearing.

The Tánaiste: We are in a position to take this additional set of measures because of our budgetary strategy and the position of the public finances.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: You were forced into it.

The Tánaiste: It has enabled us to do many things which are helping people in the here and now and things which are in place for the long term. One million children are getting free school books. There are hot school meals in our primary schools.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: How many of those cannot-----

The Tánaiste: The fuel allowance worth-----

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Bus transport.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Their mums and dads were on the streets last week.

The Tánaiste: -----over €1,000 per winter, with one in four households qualifying, including those on working family payments. VAT on gas and electricity has been cut to 9%.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Homeless figures.

The Tánaiste: Three hundred thousand people can access free HRT.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: And 17,000 are homeless.

Deputy David Cullinane: Or in energy arrears.

The Tánaiste: There are increased weekly payments for pensioners, carers and people with disabilities.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: How many children are in poverty?

The Tánaiste: The minimum wage is up 40% since 2020 to make sure work pays. Back to school allowance has been expanded to preschool children. There has been the largest ever increase in child support payments. More than 55,000 families with children in third level pay no contribution fee at all, and that number is growing. Auto-enrolment has been introduced, supporting 763,000 workers to build retirement security and, for the first time, public investment in a public model of childcare to build and overhaul our childcare systems.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Cathy Bennett: That never happened.

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: Ceann Comhairle, when the noise stops-----

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: The energy price shock does also highlight the importance of reducing our dependence on imported fossil fuels and accelerating the climate transition. As long as we remain, in this country, dependent on fossil fuels from imports we risk our economic security and well-being.

We are implementing the largest infrastructure programme in the history of the State and capital investment is projected to exceed €200 billion over the next decade. Thankfully, we are seeing clear progress now with almost half - 49% - of the country's electricity generated from renewables in March, 58,000 homes retrofitted last year and recent changes we have made to

State schemes have seen a strong surge in applications, applications which are of course being funded by carbon tax, which some in this House seek to abolish. We are seeing record demand - over 29,000 applications already this year-----

Deputy David Cullinane: Record rents.

The Tánaiste: -----across SEAI schemes because the Government has made it more attractive and more financially possible than ever before for households to upgrade their homes. We are seeing applications for heat pumps surge by 95%, roof insulation by 81% and cavity wall insulation by 62%.

Deputy David Cullinane: People cannot pay their bills.

The Tánaiste: We are accelerating delivery-----

Deputy David Cullinane: You are so out of touch.

The Tánaiste: -----particularly for those most in need, while continuing to support tens of thousands of Irish homeowners with upgrades. We are also delivering at scale for the most vulnerable, with over 8,100 homes completed last year under the warmer homes scheme, which is the highest number ever.

There is always more to do and challenges will always come but in a time of enormous and rapid change, the one constant has been a Government working to secure the well-being of the Irish people. We did it through the Covid-19 pandemic. We did it together through the war in Ukraine. We have done it together through the cost-of-living crisis. We have done it through the tariff induced uncertainty and we will respond and work together again while others seek to just tear it down.

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: We have provided financial and other supports to households and businesses in a range of ways. We have deployed the State's balance sheet to maintain jobs, livelihoods and incomes. Each challenge the world has thrown at us we have emerged stronger from, despite it. The strength of the Irish economy is clearly evident in our labour market. Unemployment has remained below 5% for 16 consecutive quarters. This is a remarkable achievement given the global headwinds. That means that over 450,000 more people are now in employment that just before the pandemic. Around 57,000 of those jobs were added in the past 12 months alone: over 200 jobs every working day.

The strength of our labour market mirrors developments across the wider economy. Business investment is up and consumer spending is resilient. These are signs of continued confidence in our economy among firms and households despite a more uncertain backdrop.

As well as steering the economy through the challenges of recent years, our public finances are in good shape. The choices that matter most often get the least attention. In 2012, Ireland's public debt stood at 163% of national income.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Why was that?

The Tánaiste: Today it stands at 62%. That reduction did not happen by accident. It happened because successive Governments, including this one, have run structural primary surpluses, have treated windfall corporate tax receipts as temporary rather than permanent revenue and have made deliberate decisions to sterilise those receipts into long-term saving funds. Our positive fiscal position-----

Deputy David Cullinane: Clapping yourself on the back when people cannot pay bills. This is outrageous.

The Tánaiste: -----has given us the ability to respond to the energy price shock and other countries and other executives, including in Northern Ireland, have not been in a position to respond similarly.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: How many more bouquets are you going to throw at yourself?

The Tánaiste: We benefit from having acted-----

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Control your contributions, please. Fair hearing. Deputy.

The Tánaiste: -----to address the structural challenges that lay on the horizon.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I would sit down if I were you.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: You are embarrassing yourself.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: You need to get out of the bubble.

An Ceann Comhairle: Excuse me. Fair hearing. Deputy.

The Tánaiste: To enhance our economic resilience we have established two long-term saving funds, the Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Some of your backbenchers are cringing.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: They really are.

The Tánaiste: We now have the fiscal power to respond to external shocks. That was not always guaranteed. The external environment that we face is clouded in considerable uncertainty. Whatever the developments are in the Middle East over the coming days, the economic fallout of the conflict is likely to persist given the lasting a real damage to energy

infrastructure. As a result, the supply-demand imbalance in energy markets is likely to continue for some time.

Although we cannot, of course, know the scale of the imbalance, it will depend on an array of factors. Ireland, as a small open economy, will always feel these global shocks but we are better prepared than we have been in the past. We entered 2026 from a position of relative economic strength. We expect the Irish economy to continue to grow, albeit at a slower pace than previously envisaged. My Department will shortly publish its updated economic assessment.

At moments like this, it has always been abundantly clear that we have an Opposition that has no shortage of spending plans but no strategy for growth.

Deputy David Cullinane: It is all our fault, is it?

The Tánaiste: No thought is ever given to how it would fund its endless commitments.

Deputy David Cullinane: Here we go again.

The Tánaiste: For a week, the airwaves were filled by those who shout the loudest and command the most attention online.

Deputy Matt Carthy: The ordinary working people.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: When are Ministers-----

(Interruptions)

Deputy Matt Carthy: He did not like that.

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: In an age shaped by social media algorithms-----

(Interruptions)

Deputy John Brady: So is the news.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, you will listen? I ask for respectful discourse.

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: -----and 24-hour news cycles, it is easy to mistake that volume for consensus.

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: People feel real pressures but no one in this republic gets to restrict the right of anyone else to move or go about their business.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

The Tánaiste: Beneath the noise, we have the cancer patients who could not get to their chemotherapy-----

(Interruptions)

Deputy Matt Carthy: There are a million workers-----

Deputy David Cullinane: Therapy sessions are being cancelled. The Tánaiste has some brass neck.

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: We had the expectant mothers who did not get to their check-ups-----

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, save it for your contributions.

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: We had the man who did not get to his dialysis appointment.

Deputy David Cullinane: The Government is not even meeting its own cancer targets.

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: We had the worker who lost a day's pay because they could not get to their job.

(Interruptions)

Deputy David Cullinane: Spare me.

An Ceann Comhairle: Through the Chair.

The Tánaiste: We had the parents stuck in traffic with screaming kids. We had the business owner who could not open because of a lack of stock.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Kids in emergency accommodation-----

Deputy David Cullinane: Talk about fair.

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: While we might not have heard from these people much, we know too-----

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: -----that they are feeling the pressure.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: You will expect a fair hearing.

The Tánaiste: These are people who feel the pressure every day. They get up in the morning, they go to work and they try to get on with it.

Deputy David Cullinane: They are made up with the Government.

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: There are genuine, hard-working people concerned-----

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: You will expect to get a fair hearing.

The Tánaiste: -----who joined the protests too because they are feeling the pinch, decent people who need our help and assistance. They will remain our focus. They will remain our focus every day, including in our resolutions tonight.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: That is where the demonisation-----

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputies.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Civility is not a weakness but it is mandatory. Please, Deputies.

The Tánaiste: That is what fairness looks like. It is what a strong economy can deliver: real outcomes, a good job and security for you and your family.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: The Tánaiste cannot believe that.

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: This Government has acted. It has acted decisively and it is using its economic strength wisely. Together, we will get through this challenge-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: Is the only way-----

(Interruptions)

The Tánaiste: -----but we will not get through it by seeking to sow division and tear our country apart.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: If the Tánaiste says it again, he might actually believe it.

Deputy David Cullinane: Tone deaf.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputies to have a respectful discourse. I call the Minister of State, Deputy Canney.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Here we go. The Independent voice.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Arrogance personified.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Seán Canney): I thank the Ceann Comhairle.

A Deputy: How did the Minister of State get on with the bridge in Waterford?

(Interruptions)

Deputy Seán Canney: Over the past number of weeks, fear and uncertainty have been caused by the war in the Middle East.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: No. It is caused by you.

Deputy Seán Canney: I understand why people are worried and the pressures they are facing.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: They cannot pay their bills.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Seán Canney: The hugely volatile situation is ever evolving and has meant there is a lack of certainty for people that is causing worry and distress. This Government has been working hard to ensure that supports are put in place to ease that burden on people. As soon as the conflict in Iran began, we stepped up the engagement with stakeholders across all sectors.

Engagement is key to developing any support and hearing from the official representatives of stakeholders and organisations, so we can put supports in place that are driven by evidence and that help where they are needed most.

We announced an initial package in March that totalled €250 million. As Independents in government, we have constructively been involved in the process from the beginning. Within my own Department, the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, and I have been engaging with all stakeholders in the logistics and supply chain areas, which are impacted severely by this fuel crisis. We have been doing this regularly since the war began.

We made it clear at the time that what we initially announced would be under constant review and we would step up with additional support if and when it was needed.

Deputy Matt Carthy: You went on holidays when it was happening.

Deputy Seán Canney: Engagement and dialogue continue with stakeholders and representative groups to ensure that any additional measures that need to be put in place would benefit these key sectors within the economy, such as transport, logistics, school transport operators and more.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Did you engage with them by postcard?

Deputy Seán Canney: Within agriculture, the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Healy Rae, and the Minister of State, Deputy Noel Grealish, along with their colleagues, the Minister, Deputy Martin Heydon, and the Minister of State, Deputy Timmy Dooley, have been engaging with various farming organisations to see where this help is most needed.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputies.

Deputy Seán Canney: A further package of measures was confirmed on Sunday night following engagement across key sectors. This has been outlined already.

Deputy Martin Kenny: Following a week of protest.

Deputy Seán Canney: There will be an extensive reduction in excise duties until 31 July; a further reduction of 10 cent in the price of diesel, bringing the total reduction to 32 cent per litre; a further reduction of 10 cent in the price of petrol, bringing the total reduction to 27 cent per litre; and a reduction of 2.4 cent in marked gas oil, green diesel. A comprehensive new €100 million fuel subsidy scheme to assist farmers, agricultural contractors and fishers across unprecedented increases in fuel has also been confirmed.

The transport support scheme we have put in place amounts to €120 million. It is important to say that these combined packages have brought the total support to €775 million, the largest package in the EU *per capita*.

As Independents, we entered government to effect change. We made the decision to enter government so that we could be central in making key decisions to help our economy and citizens.

Deputy Matt Carthy: You failed.

Deputy Seán Canney: The war in Iran is affecting every single citizen in this country. The State cannot handle every element of this pressure, but we have worked collectively and in partnership with other Government parties to introduce key supports to ease the burden.

Over the past week, we have seen some members of the Opposition actively encourage obstruction, which is not acceptable. Key infrastructure was placed under threat. This does not help anybody. We need to work together in these unprecedented times. I ask the Opposition to reflect on what it is trying to do today. If the Opposition succeeds in its aim to-----

Deputy David Cullinane: Hold the Government to account. Imagine that.

Deputy Seán Canney: -----put this Government out of business, that €775 million of support will not be in place for the people of Ireland-----

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, the Deputies will have their opportunity.

Deputy Seán Canney: -----and the issues will become immensely more difficult for everybody.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: More difficult for you.

Deputy Seán Canney: It is time to show leadership-----

Deputy David Cullinane: I agree with the Minister of State there absolutely.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Seán Canney: -----and that we have the courage to put the measures in place.

Deputy David Cullinane: Support the no confidence motion and show some real leadership.

A Deputy: Show some backbone.

Deputy Michael Collins: The Minister of State is finished as an Independent.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Minister of State finished?

Deputy Seán Canney: Yes.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: He is finished in every sense of the word.

Deputy Michael Collins: Game over.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy McDonald.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran: We start-----

An Ceann Comhairle: No, the Minister of State will not. Please, respect the discourse.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Has the Minister of State woken up? I wondered where he was.

An Ceann Comhairle: Civility is not a weakness on anybody's behalf but good manners on everybody's.

A Deputy: We can only take so much of this.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Is é seo bun agus barr an scéil. An bhfuil muinín muintir na tíre tuillte ag an Rialtas seo? Tar éis míonna de chostais ag ardú, neamhaird a dhéanamh ar na foláirimh, buiséad a thréig oibrithe teaghlaigh, cúramóirí agus daoine le míchumas, is léir nach bhfuil. Rinne an Rialtas an ghéarchéim seo níos measa. Tá an caighdeán maireachtála ag titim agus tá daoine faoi bhrú ollmhór. Tá an Rialtas seo ag teipeadh. Níl muinín na Dála seo tuillte aige.

Today, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Independents ask us to vote confidence in their Government, in their judgment, in their competence and in their ability to protect people in the crisis. It is a very brazen ask-----

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----from people who have abandoned the Irish people, from those who have stood idly by while workers, families, communities and key sectors, the backbone of the Irish economy, struggled hard. This is a Government that tried to short-change people with half measures, one that sent the Dáil home for 20 days in the middle of this crisis and refused and refuses to listen.

Deputy Michael Collins: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: This is a Government that at every turn acted only to inflame an already desperate situation. There is global instability. The illegal war by the United States and Israel against Iran has driven oil prices upwards and that war must end, but it is the

Government's own arrogance, its lack of judgment, its lack of any empathy that have left people with no conclusion other than this: its time is up.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Let us be honest - all of this did not start last week. The seeds were sown in the budget in October, a budget of €9.4 billion that still managed to leave people worse off. In that budget, the Government claimed that the cost-of-living crisis had passed and it turned its back on reality. It was a budget that looked after developers, corporate landlords and the banks, but left workers, carers, people with disabilities and families behind. The Government pretended everything was fine while people knew it was anything but that. Since then, things have only got worse.

People feel it every single day. They live it in the supermarkets, at the petrol pumps, when the bills land on the kitchen table, as workers head out the door in the morning wondering how they will afford to fill their car, as families ration heat and decide which rooms they can afford to warm, and as carers and people with disabilities face the choice of heating or eating. That is their lived reality.

What did the Government do as this pressure built? Well, it sent out bills to parents to increase school transport fees. It reintroduced exam fees for leaving cert and junior cert students. Prices continued to rise. The warnings came, too. The Government was told, but it ignored every last one of us. Its half measures three weeks ago only tinkered at the edges. A modest cut in excise was wiped out almost immediately. There was absolutely no action on home heating oil and no meaningful support for workers. We told the Government clearly that its half measures would not cut it. Remember, we also provided it with an alternative that would have made fuel affordable and would have supported people, but the Government walked away. It sent the Dáil home for 20 days while people struggled. That was 20 days while costs surged and families were left to cope alone. Taoiseach, I wrote to you-----

The Taoiseach: You did, yes.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----and I asked you to convene the Dáil immediately, and you ignored me. You ignored me because you were completely out of touch.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That is the truth.

The Taoiseach: You went on your holidays.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: People have had enough. Workers across the State know exactly what has happened here.

The Tánaiste: You were on holidays.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: They know that they are paying more and getting less. They know that life has become unaffordable. They know that Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Independents are not on their side. Now people are demanding real measures. Yes, it has been the farmers, the agricultural contractors, the hauliers, the bus companies and others who have led the charge-----

A Deputy: Did you meet any of them?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----but people everywhere now are calling for real action and real leadership. The Government does not provide that. On the contrary, its attitude over the past week was the arrogance of this Government writ large and its message to the ordinary people whom it sneered at was like it or lump it. The Government demeaned peaceful protesters. It insulted them, and it insult them here again today. It refused to meet them because it decided that doing so was beneath it, it seems.

Minister for Transport (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Did you meet them?

Deputy David Cullinane: Lots of them. They were looking for you.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: It was beneath the Government, as if it has any great lofty standard about who it will sit down with. Give me a break.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, please, whether you like what she is saying or not-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: We only have to look to the Government's grubby deal with Deputy Michael Lowry to see how very far from the truth that is. It will do deals, when it suits it, with anyone. It will negotiate when it suits it, but when ordinary, decent people raised their voice-----

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Those threatening-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----it turned its back. Incredibly, it then escalated the situation through its rhetoric and refusal to engage, and then it threatened people, including with talk of sending in the Army. That is not leadership.

Even after all of that, the pressure and the protests, the Government come back with more half measures, not the comprehensive package that it brags of today. A small cut in excise, which does not make fuel affordable-----

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Sinn Féin voted against the last excise cut.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----and only a delay in the carbon tax increase do not meet the scale of this crisis.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Do the Deputies not want to listen to their own leader?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That cut would be gone with the next price spike. There is no removal of the excise or carbon tax still on home heating oil. There is no real relief for households. The Government completely ignores carers and people with disabilities for whom fuel is essential, not a discretionary spend.

Today, as Government Members back-slap, congratulate and flatter one another, just know that beyond their bubble, people see a Government that is out of touch, refusing to listen or act in their interests, and unable to understand their lives. They have had enough.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Trust between Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Independents and the people is shattered. Big promises made at the general election were broken one after the other. They promised income tax cuts every year. They broke that promise in their first budget. There was not one red cent for working people. Developers, landlords and banks were looked after though. They promised affordable childcare. Where is it? Parents are still waiting. They promised to abolish student fees and then increased them. They promised to abolish the means test for carers but at their pace that will take decades.

Deputy David Cullinane: It will take 50 years.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: They promised cheaper energy. Bills have gone up and they took away the energy credits. They promised support for renters and then changed the law and threw renters to the wolves with the potential massive hikes for new tenancies. There is then that promise from the Tánaiste, Simon Harris, that no child would wait more than four months for spinal surgery, which was broken again and again. These are the hallmarks of a Government with no vision, no direction and no leadership at a time when our country desperately needs all of those things.

To Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and their Independent backers I say their time is up. They must listen to the voices of those decent working people who were out on the streets peacefully demonstrating and calling them out.

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil: Were you with them?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: By God, they do not like the people calling them out, do they?

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil: You were not with them.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: They were telling the Government that they have had enough.

Deputy John Lahart: What were they going to do?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Today we, on their behalf, reiterate that stance and tell the Government that it is time now for an election.

A Deputy: They ran straight to the radio.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Let the people have their say because this Government no longer commands the confidence of the Dáil or of the Irish people and it is time to go.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Níl an Rialtas seo ag éisteacht le gnáthmhuintir na tíre. Níl sé sásta an gníomh a dhéanamh le cáin a ghearradh ar bhreosla sa dóigh is go mbeadh sé ar phraghas réasúnta. I gceantar tuaithe na hÉireann fud fad na tíre, tá oibrithe, teaghlaigh, feirmeoirí agus comhlachtaí beaga faoi bhrú ollmhór, gan rogha ar bith acu ach praghsanna arda a íoc. Nuair a labhair daoine amach agus nuair a chuaigh siad chun na sráide, chuir an Rialtas seo a gcás ar leataobh agus bhagair sé orthu in áit éisteacht leo. Fiú anois, tá na bearta atá á dtabhairt chun tosaigh ag an Rialtas i bhfad rólag. Is Rialtas é seo a bhfuil teipthe air, agus níl muinín ghnáthdhaoine na tíre seo ann. Caithfidh sé imeacht.

A government that does not listen does not have the confidence of ordinary people and, by God, this is a Government that does not listen. I lost count, but maybe the Ceann Comhairle might inform us, of how many pats on the back the Tánaiste gave himself earlier? I tell you that I have never heard such an out-of-touch speech in this Dáil. This is a Government that still refuses to make fuel prices affordable at the pumps. If the Tánaiste were listening he would know that the cost-of-living crisis is crushing ordinary people. Fuel prices have surged. Still more than half of what people pay at the pumps is taken away in taxes. Week after the week prices rose and pressure mounted. What did Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Independents do? They did nothing of substance. There was no urgency, no real intervention and no leadership. They stood back while people were being pushed to the brink. Their first response was an insult and any benefit was wiped out almost immediately. There was no action on home heating oil and no meaningful support for households or rural communities. It did not come close to addressing the problem.

Then what happened? They walked away and refused to recall the Dáil, which did not sit for 20 days. All the while, households faced soaring bills while workers struggled to get to work. Farmers and contractors face rising prices and input costs with no support from Government. We have seen businesses being pushed closer and closer to the edge. It was a failure and dereliction of duty, leaving people with no option but to rise up and take to the streets.

Instead of listening, what did Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Independents do? They dismissed them. They talked down to them. They refused to meet them. They threatened them. They threatened the Army on their own people. These are families struggling to heat their homes for God's sake and workers struggling to get to work. Farmers and rural communities are trying to keep going and this Government's instinct was not to help them but it was to threaten them.

3 o'clock

Deputy Matt Carthy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: That is not leadership; that is arrogance. That is a Government that is out of touch. What are people being asked to have confidence in? A package that still does not make fuel affordable. A 10-cent cut in excise gone with the next price increase. The Government outright refuses to cut carbon taxes, there is no removal of excise on home heating oil at all, nothing that fundamentally changes things for ordinary households or rural communities, no real relief for workers, farmers or families and no support at all for disabled people. This is not a solution; it is a holding operation designed to contain the anger, not solve the problem. Do you know something? People see right through it.

Let me say what would actually build confidence. Cut excise on diesel to a level that makes it affordable and hold it there. Match that reduction with petrol. Remove carbon tax from home heating oil and do the same on green diesel to support our farmers and contractors-----

Deputy Martin Heydon: Like you did in the North?

Deputy Pearse Doherty: -----and deliver real supports to households as well as sectors.

Deputy Peter Burke: Do you want to cost that? Try to cost it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Include in that the energy credits to make sure that people are supported with the sky-high electricity costs. That is what real intervention looks like, folks. That is what leadership looks like.

Deputy John Cummins: How much?

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I say to the so-called Independents over there and to the backbenchers opposite in Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael that they know damn well what is happening in their communities. They are hearing it every single day. People are angry and people are struggling and people are being pushed to the limit here. Sinn Féin has brought their voice into this Chamber and now all the Independents and backbenchers over there have a choice to either stand with Micheál Martin and Simon Harris or stand with the ordinary Irish people. Confidence is not something you demand; it is something you earn-----

Deputy David Cullinane: Hear, hear.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: -----and this Government has not earned it. It has ignored the warnings, it has allowed the crisis to escalate, it has responded too late and even now it refuses to act decisively. I was elected by ordinary people, I speak out for ordinary people-----

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil: So were we.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: -----and today I stand with ordinary people-----

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil: How dare you? Who do you think you are?

Deputy Pearse Doherty: ----- in voting no confidence in this Government. It is time for it to go.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Enough. Deputy Ivana Bacik.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: A Cheann Comhairle, Labour has no confidence in this Government. This Government has failed to tackle the cost-of-living crisis. Its members have shown a total disregard for the mounting pressures facing households and businesses across the country. The Labour Party warned in March when the first package of measures was announced that workers and families would continue to face impossible cost burdens. We warned then that Government needed to adopt robust policies on renewable energy, transport costs and remote working. The events of last week and the support from the public for the aims of the protests were not just about fuel prices but the Government has patently failed to recognise this. It has failed to recognise why so many people across the country are so angry with it. It is about energy bills but it is also about exorbitant rents and mortgage costs, house prices, childcare, education and healthcare costs, waiting lists and more. It is about a budget last October that did nothing for working people. It is about a housing crisis only getting worse as more and more young people choose to leave this country because they see no future here. It is about the thousands stuck on waiting lists for treatment, therapies, disability services and assessments of need. It is about a lack of special education supports for children with additional needs, and so much more.

Last week, Labour recognised the deep distress and frustration felt by so many. Last Wednesday morning, we called on the Government to engage urgently with representative groups to ensure a resolution. We also called for the lifting of blockades to limit disruption to families, lives and businesses and ensure fuel reached those who needed it. We rejected the intimidatory tactics of some while absolutely respecting the right to peaceful protest of many. We watched all week in mounting dismay as Ministers of this Government responded by going on the airwaves and pouring petrol on the flames of anger. Instead of de-escalating, they inflamed the situation. The meeting the Government eventually convened on Friday afternoon could and should have been held sooner. Government could and should have acted more swiftly to address the real and genuine concerns of so many.

The Government's actions over the last week alone have shown it is incapable of handling crisis situations. This Government is worn out, tired out and zoned out from the reality of people's lives. After too many years in office, this Government of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Lowry group and, it seems, half the Healy-Raes just did not get the message. In the week before Easter, the message should have been received loud and clear about the growing fuel and energy security crisis resulting from Trump and Netanyahu's illegal warmongering in Iran and Lebanon.

However, Government leaders were more focused then on talking about tax cuts for the rich. In the week when grocery inflation was reported at over 6%, the Tánaiste was on a media blitz for his new investment savings scheme. While 320,000 households are in arrears on their electricity bills, the Taoiseach was ruminating on inheritance tax cuts in the next budget. That is where the Government's priority was - totally out of touch.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Hear, hear.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: As protests began, there followed a week of dithering, confusion and mixed messages. Bombastic statements were issued by the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste on Wednesday night, but with no real follow through. On Thursday morning the justice Minister ratcheted up the tension by announcing that the assistance of the Defence Forces had been requested. In his rush to get on the airwaves, it appears he neglected to consult with the Minister for Defence. His intervention only inflamed the situation further.

Not to be outdone, of course, the Minister for media announced yesterday that he wants Coimisiún na Meán to investigate media coverage of the protests. Goodbye Viktor Orbán, hello Patrick O'Donovan.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Ged Nash: I would say there was a sliding tackle from Coimisiún na Meán earlier on.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: At best, one might hope this was a cynical attempt to distract from a disastrous week for the Government, but at worst, and in seriousness, it is a Minister resorting to sinister threats against the national broadcaster because it was doing its job of reporting fairly on events around the country.

Yet as bad as last week was, the real crisis has yet to properly hit us. The International Energy Agency, IEA, has been warning for weeks that the world now faces the most severe energy crisis ever recorded, a supply shock that has yet to properly hit Ireland or Europe. So Taoiseach, where is our national fuel security plan? The crisis of last week shows a shocking unpreparedness if we end up facing a fuel rationing situation.

The Labour Party has no confidence in this Government to bring forward the radical proposals that need to be introduced, as the IEA has advised, such as proposals that Labour has made for remote working, making public transport free and taking serious measures to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. Ireland needs real action now to invest in renewable energy, retrofitting and solar and wind installation in order to reduce energy costs, curb emissions and tackle the climate crisis.

That is another reason why Labour has no confidence in this Administration, because by its deeds and actions it has shown itself to be the most conservative and ideologically right-wing Government in a generation.

The Taoiseach: With all the money we are spending?

Deputy Ivana Bacik: It has consistently rowed back on climate action commitments. It has arrogantly dismissed and consistently voted down constructive proposals from Labour and others in opposition on taking action on housing, workers' rights and on the cost of living. The Government stopped sick pay increases and rowed back on a living wage. It voted down our Labour Party Bill on the right to remote working. It sneered at calls for stronger State action on housing or the development of a State construction company. The budget last October provided no relief for working people. It failed to index income taxes, removed vital once-off supports and at the same time committed millions of euro to untargeted VAT cuts for construction and hospitality - big builders and burger barons.

The value of those VAT cuts will be washed away in the inflation likely to hit us over the next six months. The price of construction of a house is already reported to have increased by between €25,000 and €30,000. The VAT cut on hospitality was never going to be passed on anyway and would have been better spent on targeted supports for those now in fuel and energy poverty. This Government cannot be trusted to manage the public finances. There is a €600 million deficit already forecast for the Department of education. The Government managed to spend nearly a billion euro on fuel supports without any new measures that will tackle energy poverty or address the near €200 million of arrears on household gas and electricity bills.

As our Labour Party finance spokesperson, Ged Nash, has said, the measures the Government announced on Sunday are designed to placate sectoral interests, effectively abandoning PAYE workers - low and middle-income earners who have no option other than to pay taxes but whose pay packets that are under increasing pressure in this cost-of-living crisis. There is pressure from rising energy bills but also from skyrocketing grocery prices as we face food insecurity, and from escalating housing costs. We need substantive engagement from Government at the upcoming LEEF talks, substantive engagement with the trade unions, and Labour will strongly support the trade union movement in seeking pay rises for hard-pressed workers and working families.

We all know who caused outbreak of this most recent fuel crisis, yet this Government has failed to condemn the illegal war launched by Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu.

We know that our economy, our energy security and our society are being threatened because of the actions of the US and Israel. The Government must now call in the US ambassador, challenge them on their illegal warmongering, their threats made just a week ago to wipe out a civilisation and their ongoing blockade of ships. We must recognise the United States is not acting as a friend any more and the fuel protests result from the US and Israel's war on Iran. The Government must press the EU to sanction Israel as it seeks to conquer southern Lebanon. We are watching in horror as Israel erases villages from the map, colonises the West Bank and continues to destroy Gaza and entrench its system of apartheid. When will the EU act to end the trade agreement with Israel? When will the Government act to pass the occupied territories Bill it committed to in the general election but walked away from once office was secured? Now is the time, and the Taoiseach would have Opposition support to send America and Israel a real message on this and pass the occupied territories Bill in full to cover trade in goods and services, and to work with Spain and other progressives across the EU to force the EU to suspend the Israel trade agreement. These are real things that could be done but we know the Taoiseach will not do them because his conservative Government lacks the courage to do so.

Taoiseach, you have failed PAYE workers, struggling households and hard-pressed families. We in the Labour Party have no confidence in you.

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Helen McEntee): I join colleagues in supporting this motion of confidence in the Government today. We are living through a period of profound global instability. Across the Gulf, we are seeing not only disruption to energy supply and vital shipping routes but we are witnessing the further appalling and unacceptable loss of life, the human cost of which cannot be overlooked. It is essential that we progress and engage with colleagues to urgently de-escalate and sustain our diplomatic engagement. I will continue with Government to engage with colleagues and counterparts across the Gulf and the Middle East with our ambassadors on the ground, our colleagues in the EU and of course with our counterparts in the US. The partial closure and blockading of the Strait of Hormuz has had immediate and far-reaching consequences, sending shockwaves through global markets. As we all know, it is directly impacting families and businesses here in Ireland. We can see it at the pumps, in our bills and in the cost of living people are facing every day. We are all, in government, listening to the concerns of people, to our constituents and beyond.

Despite the global uncertainty, this Government has acted. We were among the first governments to respond in recent weeks, responding at a greater level than many other countries. We intervened early with an initial package of €250 million, making it clear at the time that we would continue to engage with those most impacted, but also recognising the evolving nature of this crisis, including the possibility that fuel costs might ease in the event of a ceasefire. This has not been the case and so engagement has continued. The Opposition does not have monopoly on engagement. We have all spoken to those in our constituencies - hauliers, farmers, bus operators and farm contractors. We have engaged over the past number of weeks with those hardest hit by the increase in fuel costs but we are also recognising that everybody is being hit by this global crisis. That is why a further package of €525 million was agreed by Government this week. This is a direct response to the engagement and the concerns raised with all of us. I wonder will the Opposition support this package or will it reject it in the way it did the previous €250 million.

Peaceful protest is a fundamental part of our democracy. It must always be respected and, indeed, we must all protect it. However, preventing fuel from reaching communities during a fuel crisis, at a time when supply chains are under pressure, only risks shortages and places further strain on communities. I again stress that the strains and pressures we are experiencing are driven mainly by global events, conflict, instability and supply chain disruption far beyond our shores. What we can do as a Government, and what we are doing, is to mitigate those impacts. We will continue to support people in whatever way we can as a Government to protect jobs and livelihoods and support our communities the length and breadth of this country.

Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (Deputy Jack Chambers): The conflict in the Middle East and the global energy crisis have created major challenges for economies around the world. The Government fully understands the significant pressure rising costs are placing on so many families, workers and businesses across our country. All Deputies in this House are listening to people and businesses who are struggling. Listening, engaging and understanding is what has informed the significant intervention the Government has been able to make. However, the sum of the

actions in the past week - blockading critical infrastructure, restricting free movement of people, disrupting critical supply chains and threatening An Garda Síochána - is reckless, irresponsible and deeply concerning for our society.

In the space of six weeks, more than €700 million of support has now been made available to workers, households, businesses and the sectors most exposed to the increased fuel prices. Following specific engagement we have provided supports in transport and agriculture but, unlike what Deputy Bacik said, the majority of workers across the economy will benefit from the reduction in excise in terms of the price at the pump and also from the significant support that has been made around the expansion of the fuel allowance. While all countries are impacted, none have responded on the scale we have been able to respond to provide for our citizens, with the largest *per capita* support package of any EU member state. Táimid ag obair de shíor, ag éisteacht le daoine agus ag déanamh ár ndícheall an brú atá ar dhaoine a laghdú. Ón gcáinainéis amach agus ó thosach na bliana, chuireamar pacáistí cabhracha don phobal chun cinn.

The reason Ireland is uniquely placed to make such a timely, timebound and targeted intervention is because of the strength of our economy and public finances. We have run budget surpluses every year since 2022, we have record employment levels and 500,000 more people working in our economy than at the start of the decade. We continue to reduce our debt, we are delivering record expansion of public services and by the end of this year we will have put €24 billion aside into two long-term funds. This is why have been able to respond to the sudden global economic shocks. Our economic strength has not been created by chance; it is because of the hard work of Irish people and the responsible and sensible decisions taken by Government, grounded in a pro-enterprise approach, being careful in how we expand expenditure. All I hear from the Opposition is a model of higher tax, higher spending, more expansion and continued populism in every decision it seeks to promote. The decisions we take at all times have been responsible and always in the national interest, building resilience. Our response to the challenge of today must allow to be able to respond to the unknown challenges of tomorrow. As we speak here, huge uncertainty remains about the conflict in the Middle East and the knock-on long-term impact of that conflict on prices and inflation.

Minister for Education and Youth (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): At no point over the past week did any member of Sinn Féin speak about the impact the blockades had on ordinary people - sick people trying to get to hospital appointments, workers trying to get to work, families visiting relatives or business owners losing customers. Instead, they spoke about how the Government was not doing enough. Not once did they criticise the blockades which caused such misery to people across this country. Their response today is to table a no confidence motion in a Government working hard every day to deliver on commitments we made to the Irish people.

Since being appointed as Minister for Education and Youth last November, I have been working with the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Moynihan, and delivered a number of important programme for Government commitments. These will have a real impact on our education system, help students and young people and support teachers and school staff. I will inform the House of what my Department has been doing over the past number of months. On special education, we announced the opening of four new special schools and detailed the roll-out of the new education therapy services which will see therapists working with children,

teachers and SNAs in our special schools. To help tackle educational disadvantage, we announced the biggest ever investment in a single year, of €48 million, in the new DEIS strategy and the DEIS plus scheme, which includes targeted supports for 121 schools with the highest level of educational disadvantage. We have begun accepting applications for supports for survivors of abuse in residential institutions such as industrial schools and reformatories. To ensure our education system continues to deliver world-class outcomes, we launched the national conversation on education and the national convention on the future of education. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for children, young people, parents, educators and wider society to help Ireland's educational system for decades to come. I could go on to speak about the €7.55 billion in capital investment. I have full confidence in this Government.

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy James Browne): I welcome this discussion today and the opportunity to speak in full confidence in the Government and its leadership. There is no doubt the Dáil and every single one of us here, all of us elected representatives, are experiencing in our constituencies the impact of global political uncertainty on real people, families and businesses. Events that seem so far away geographically have a very immediate impact on everyday costs for people, from food to fuel and the very basics. We can all acknowledge this is a deeply challenging period but it is also a period that demands that we work together in the House rather than against each other to ensure we protect the State and our people to the best of our ability.

If we ever needed reminding as to our status as an open economy on the edge of Europe, the war on Iran has once again confirmed it for us all, even after Ukraine, Brexit and Covid. This Government has been elected with the task of managing these impacts and being responsible in our response to them as they arise but also with an eye to how each and every action and measure we take has consequences. We have to manage as elected representatives the impact of rising oil prices. We need to act robustly to protect jobs and futures to ensure we fund our key services and supports, to deliver safe and secure housing for our people and to invest proactively and sustainably to get costs down for ordinary people. This is our job. It is one each of us has been elected to do and to take seriously.

We have the resources. It is due to the stewardship of our country by this Government and previous governments that we have been in a position to act decisively with financial supports. Over the past five years our State has experienced the effects of global wars in Ukraine and on the edge of Europe, the war in Iran and the pandemic, which have, in turn, placed systemic pressures on how we do business. The Government has responded robustly but we must do so in a sustainable way. As Minister for housing and local government, I thank our fire services and our local authorities, which stepped up in very difficult circumstances over the past couple of weeks.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Finally the Minister for housing says something about housing at the end of his speech. There was nothing to say about housing by the Minister for housing.

Deputy Matt Carthy: For all the Government's arrogance and backslapping, the truth that Ministers have not divulged is that their TDs are under more pressure today than they have been in a political lifetime. This pressure is not coming from Sinn Féin or any other party but

it is coming from their constituents. Yes, Sinn Féin tabled the no confidence motion but we are just the messengers.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Before you saw the package.

Deputy Matt Carthy: The message has been sent loud and clear; the Government has failed and it has lost the trust of the people.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Hear, hear.

Deputy Matt Carthy: It refused to listen or to acknowledge the financial pressures faced by workers, carers, people with disabilities and families. It ignored small businesses, farmers, contractors, bus drivers, hauliers and virtually everyone else. It introduced a budget that made people worse off and then it had to be dragged kicking and screaming to act, and when it did it introduced half measures.

Those who have been making their voices heard are the salt of the earth. I have spoken to them. They are hard-working people, most of whom had never protested before in their lives. They were the same people we turned to when the parties in government crashed the economy. They were the people who lost businesses and then rebuilt them. They are the people who went without meals in order to save their farms and their homes because the Government bailed out the banks instead. They are the backbone of the domestic economy, the lifeline of every town, village and rural community in the State, and their voices have been heard loud and clear. The question today is whether the Government has listened.

Is Teachtaí Dala muid. When the revolutionary generation established the first Dáil it made a significant decision. Elected representatives would not simply be titled "Members of Parliament". Instead, those returned by voters would be given not so much a title but an obligation as Teachtaí Dala, messengers of the people. Today is the day for every Member of the House to bring the message of the people to this Government. Will Fianna Fáil TDs bring the message they have been receiving from their constituents? Will Fine Gael TDs do so? What about the Independents, those who pretend to be champions of the people? Will they act in the interests of those who elected them or will they act in their own self-interest? The truth is that if TDs are to live up to the promise of those who established an chéad Dáil, and if they are to fulfil the pledge to be messengers of the people, then this Government will be gone tonight. It is time to pick a side. They are either on the side of those whom they pledged to represent or they are on the side of this debacle of a Government. I will be bringing the message of my constituents to the Dáil this evening. I will be voting no confidence in this shambolic Government.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: What a major revelation.

Deputy Holly Cairns: We are here today because this Government does not listen. It does not listen to the Opposition, it does not listen to its own backbenchers and, most importantly, it does not listen to the people. The cost-of-living crisis did not suddenly emerge six weeks ago when Trump attacked Iran but it has been growing and growing for years. This

Government has had the resources to provide meaningful support to people but refused to do so. Instead people have watched while it wasted countless billions and failed to deliver critical public services, housing and infrastructure, all while giving sermons about the importance of fiscal prudence. That is the backdrop to these protests.

Life in this country has become totally unaffordable for an ever-increasing number of people. People working long hours every week, barely seeing their families, are really struggling just to pay for the basics. Pensioners spend long evenings in freezing homes because they cannot afford to turn on the heat. Disabled people choose between heating their homes and charging their mobility aids. The pressure is relentless and it is draining. The cost of groceries, energy and housing have all skyrocketed with no end in sight. For many the fuel increases were a tipping point and these protests were a way to express that.

I want to be clear that the Social Democrats do not agree with blockades of critical infrastructure but I do understand people's frustration and their growing sense of desperation. Last week, as protests began to grow, instead of recognising that frustration and that desperation and engaging with people, the Government refused to listen. A succession of senior Ministers issued combative, patronising and dismissive statements. The Minister for justice spoke about sending out the Defence Forces before anyone had even spoken to the protesters. That is not leadership; it is a failure of leadership.

The vast majority of protesters are farmers, hauliers and ordinary people who simply cannot keep up with the rising cost of living. One of the most stressful things is the thought of not being able to put food on the table. The mental health impact on people who rely on diesel to do their jobs does not seem to register with this Government. People are terrified. They do not want to be out on the streets; they want their Government to listen to them and to help them. The Government's failure to do so created a vacuum that has allowed a small number of far right actors to try to hijack the protest for their own agenda. The Taoiseach played right into their hands.

Now, instead of reflecting on its complete mishandling of this crisis, the Government is engaged in a blame game. The communications Minister is even blaming the media. The Government has come in here today, the first occasion the Opposition has had to ask questions, and ripped up the Dáil schedule to prevent us from doing so, showing contempt for this House as well as for the people who elected us to hold the Government accountable. It is shameful. It shows the complete arrogance of the Government and its complete inability to read the room. It is proposing a package of measures that will be of little assistance to the vast majority of people. There are 700,000 households all over the country reliant on home heating oil. The cost of it has soared 70% in just under a month. There is nothing in the Government's proposal to address this. It is further evidence, not that we needed it, that no lessons have been learned.

We all know these latest price shocks are the fault of Trump and his illegal war with Iran.

However, the scale of the impact here is not inevitable. It is the result of political choices: a political choice to cut the incomes of disabled people by €1,400 per year; a political choice to sit back while 315,000 households go into energy arrears; and a political choice to fail to make sources of renewable energy like solar accessible. This Government's political choices have failed to protect people from exactly this kind of price shock. That is a failure of vision. That failure is all the Government's.

The Social Democrats have an alternative vision for this country and a plan for immediate targeted financial supports for those who are struggling the most right now, which would deliver a €400 energy credit for households earning up to €70,000, and a real, tangible solution to help people who are struggling the most, including a solar for all scheme to double grants to €3,600 and cut people's bills by €450 each year.

An Ceann Comhairle: Time is up, Deputy. It is Deputy O'Callaghan's time.

Deputy Holly Cairns: These are proposals that we are not just talking about; we will be bringing them to the Dáil tomorrow.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: Gach lá, gach seachtain, feicfimid Rialtas atá cailte agus nach bhfuil cúram air do ghnáthdhaoine. This is a Government that does not listen. It does not listen to the people or the Opposition. It also does not listen to its own backbenchers. Having ignored all the warnings, the Government stumbled into a full-blown crisis last week. When calm leadership was required, we got chaos. Instead of pursuing a strategy of de-escalation, Ministers decided to fan the flames. GI Jim O'Callaghan arrived on the scene thinking that he was Rambo. Cá bhfuil sé anois? The last thing the country needed was that approach. Thankfully, a very effective professional policing response from An Garda Síochána brought the country back from the brink.

As the dust settles, people really struggling with the cost of living remain left behind, forgotten by this Government. These are people who cannot get their demands high up on the agenda by parking their trucks on O'Connell Street. They are people with disabilities who are already €1,400 worse off after this year's budget. A woman in my constituency had to make a choice this winter between heating her home and recharging her electric mobility aid. This meant she was virtually housebound for the winter. That is what this Government is doing to people. The words of a nurse sum up what so many people around the country are experiencing. She states:

I am working with the HSE for 16 years. My paycheck goes straight to my account to pay bills, rent and childcare fees. I am in huge debt.

The Taoiseach and Tánaiste should listen to this. She also stated:

I cannot get a deposit for a mortgage together. I cannot afford a small wedding for myself and my fiancé. I cannot afford to go to the doctor or the dentist when I am sick or ill and by the end of the week, my fridge is almost empty.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time is up. I call Deputy Whitmore.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: It is clear from listening to the speeches this afternoon that the Government still does not get it. The Taoiseach essentially listed out all the Government's so-called achievements and told people how good it really is.

The Taoiseach: No, I did not.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: You did. The Government is trying to get a message across to people that it has done so much for them. The reality is that it has not been listening. That is really clear. Last week was desperately difficult for the country. I do not think anyone would think that what happened was an easy thing to resolve. The people I spoke to in the constituency that I and the Tánaiste represent were deeply conflicted because many of them did not agree with the blockades or with people being blocked from attending appointments. They did not necessarily agree or align themselves with some of the people who were leading the protests. However, they could understand why those people were doing it. They could understand why those people were doing it, why they had left their homes and why they were living out of their tractors and trailers on O'Connell Street and could empathise with them because they are also living through it. They know how difficult it is. The people I spoke to in County Wicklow were not necessarily talking about fuel costs; they were talking about disability services, education and childcare. They talked about their lived experience and the difficulties they are facing with energy and food costs. Those costs are piling up.

The reality is that the strikes and protests last week were not necessarily just about fuel. They were about a Government that has frittered away billions, that has not listened and that is leaving huge numbers of people struggling to keep their heads above water.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Whitmore. Her time is up.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: I ask that the Government pay attention to them.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call the Minister, Deputy Foley.

Minister for Children, Disability and Equality (Deputy Norma Foley): This is a time of global uncertainty. It is a time of great difficulty and anxiety for all of society. I am more than conscious of the impact that a series of geopolitical shocks have had on people's earnings and their spending power. Inflation hurts everyone. Each crisis - Brexit, Covid-19, Ukraine, Gaza, US trade tariffs and the military action by Israel and the United States against Iran - has had a damaging impact on the price of everyday items, ranging from the weekly shop to clothing prices to topping up at the fuel pump. Tá a fhios againn, áfach, in aimsir na géarchéime, go bhfuil gá le Rialtas daingean agus slán sábháilte a chuirfidh ar fáil, ní buiséad amháin ach dhá, trí, ceithre agus cúig bhuiséad de réir a mhandáid dhaonlathach ón bpobal.

We know, in times of crisis, that there is a need for a stable and secure Government that will deliver not one but two, three, four and five budgets in line with its democratic mandate from the people. This Government is providing supports to cushion the inflationary blow insofar as is possible within the limits of responsible management of the public finances, always mindful of the unpredictable and volatile nature of global affairs, which could lead to further economic shocks at any time in the future. Mar a deirimid, ní hé lá na gaoithe, lá na scolb. In these challenging times, responsible, stable and measured government is what is required. This Government is delivering just that. For that reason, I will support the motion of confidence this afternoon.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Colm Brophy): In two minutes, it is very difficult to make a substantive contribution on such

an important topic. I just want to focus on one particular aspect. We are all, as someone stated, messengers of the people. We all need to listen to everybody. There is a real problem with the way in which those in opposition, particularly in this Parliament, have behaved in that they listened to the people who shouted loudest in respect of this matter. That is not the entire population of our country. There is a whole section of our world and our society - ordinary people, particularly older people and senior citizens - who last week could not get medical appointments. I met one woman at the weekend who was absolutely distraught about the fact that having spent five hours to get to her appointment, the consultant and doctors she was due to see could not get to the hospital. As a result, the appointment could not happen. She said to me that she does not know how to post on Instagram or go on Twitter and that, as a result, no one will hear her side of the story.

I fully recognise that people have a right to protest. I fully recognise that people feel real pain over the costs they are experiencing. However, they do not have the right to destroy someone else's life. There has to be a balance. We, as parliamentarians, do not have the right to clearly decide to pick one side because it shouts loudest and people think they can get a political stunt out of it. That is not what democracy should be about. That is not representing all the people. That is choosing, very selectively, who to represent. Unfortunately for us, this is the worst of representation. It states that if people have access to social media and if they can shout the loudest, then certain parties will weigh in behind them but will not listen to what is happening to other ordinary people.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The Government just gave €500 million to them.

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy James Lawless): People are under real pressure. That is understood. The frustrations we have seen in recent days did not appear overnight. They reflect something far deeper and more primal; a sense for many that everyday life has become harder, more expensive and more uncertain. We need to acknowledge that sincerely and respectfully. However, we also have a duty to be straight with people. Government does not control the price of global oil. As an island nation with an open economy, we are exposed to shocks that originate far beyond our shores. We are exposed in terms of our dependence on imported fossil fuels that are shipped to our shores from regions across the globe. We are vulnerable in terms of our supply chains and our just-in-time delivery model in the context of which our fast-moving economy expects and demands goods and ingredients to keep flowing and our society expects the delivery of everything from clean water to animal feed to medical supplies to happen at pace.

We need to build resilience and safeguard those critical ports and arteries. I saw first hand two years ago the devastation as Holyhead Port was taken out by a storm. I never thought we would see that happen in a deliberate, man-made fashion.

What we are doing today in response is controlling what we can control and reducing the impact with the tools available to us. The package we have announced mitigates the worst of this by cutting costs, deferring the carbon tax, cutting excise duty and providing targeted supports for targeted sectors. In fact, *per capita*, it is five times the size of the equivalent package in Germany. It stands out across Europe. It is also true that we must level with people that we cannot buy our way out of every problem. We have to take sustainable and repeatable steps that support everything we need to do.

Within my Department, I am strengthening research, apprenticeships and education to build out the knowledge economy of the future. I am also commissioning research, through the science and research mandate, to explore options around energy mix to ensure that energy security policy can be approached from an evidence base. That is real, responsible government, providing solutions and not slogans.

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Dara Calleary): We very much acknowledge the pressures that people, small businesses and many communities are under at the moment. Families are working hard and doing everything right but continue to experience huge uncertainty and challenge. We hear that and have acted, not just with the package this week and the other package a number of weeks ago, but also in the budget. Some 470,000 people now receive the fuel allowance. For the first time, working families receive the fuel allowance. We have increased that payment by four weeks this year.

We have also supported farmers, contractors and transport companies against the worst of the excesses. However, we must also be honest and say that we cannot support them through every challenge that will face them. Interventions are important and necessary but we cannot be false with people and tell them that we can get them through every challenge they face.

I not only have confidence in this Government but, more importantly, have confidence in our country and the people of the country. We have faced challenges previously. We have faced a succession of challenges over the past ten years, in particular, which have put enormous pressure on people's incomes and businesses. We will continue to work with them to get through those challenges.

Tá muinín agam, ní hamháin as an tír seo, ach as muintir na tíre. Tá sé tábhachtach go seasaimid ar son agus leis na daoine sa tír seo, go háirithe ag an bpointe seo. It is important that we stand with and support people. It is important we hear them but in hearing them, we have to be honest about the challenges that are ahead. This is the biggest energy shock, not just in respect of supply but also in respect of cost, in over 50 years. The conversation must be honest. Yes, it is important that we support and stand with people but we must be honest as well.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Jerry Buttimer): Gan amhras, tá na daoine go léir faoi bhrú, ach tá an Rialtas ag éisteacht. Táimid ag caint go mórmhór leis an gnáthdhuine, agus ag obair ar son gach duine.

This debate is nothing but a charade. If the Members opposite wanted to have questions, they would not have put forward a motion of no confidence and would have had question time.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: That is nonsense

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: The reality is that people want us to govern. People are under pressure. That is why the Government has intervened twice. I have been a Member of the Houses of the Oireachtas for 19 years and I will make a comment to Members of both Houses. Our language and words matter. Deputy Cairns spoke about leadership but leadership is not about sticking your finger in the air and wondering what way the wind is blowing. It is about acting on behalf of the people.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Government would be lost without it.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: If the Government did not listen and did not engage, we would not have had a second package worth €750 million.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Government was forced

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Language matters. It is critical. People watch and listen.

I thank the men and women of An Garda Síochána for their leadership over the past seven days. I have met and spoken to them. Some of them are friends of mine. Behind the Instagram and TikTok videos, there is truth and reality. To the men and women of An Garda Síochána, let us say "Thank you", irrespective of our political ideology because without them, we would be a poorer State. All of us in this House have a mandate. We are elected by the people. We go before the people in an election. Our Constitution preserves that right.

Deputy Denise Mitchell: I have no confidence in this Government. I never had confidence in this Government. Over the years, I have watched as the concerns of ordinary people and workers take a back seat so Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael can please big businesses, lobbyists and vulture funds. The thing that gets to me is the unfairness of it all. Thousands of children are homeless. At the same time, we have seen this Government throwing families to the wolves with its rent hike Bill. We have seen houses and apartment blocks being snapped up by vulture funds that pay little or not tax and then rent them to hard-working people at outrageous prices.

Families in my constituency are struggling with their ESB bills. Elderly people are terrified to turn on their heating because of the cost. Meanwhile, in Clonsaugh, there are data centres paying half of what households do for their electricity. How is that fair?

We had promises from the Government of a cost-of-disability payment and for an end to the means test for carer's allowance. Those are more broken promises. Instead, the Government left them worse off after the budget. What ever happened to standing up for the people who get up early in the morning? Do we remember that phrase, of which Fine Gael was so fond? Those people got nothing. I cannot be the only TD in Dublin Bay North who is hearing about the unfairness of it all. I am sure the Deputies from Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, and Deputy Heneghan, are hearing it, too. If they are, I must ask them if they care. People want a Government that will listen to them and will make decisions to make their lives easier. As usual, we have too little too late, with half measures coming from Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, all backed by the so-called regional Independents, including people such as Deputy Heneghan, who is in my constituency. He told voters he would be an independent voice and would be free from party restrictions. The reality is that he and the rest of the Lowry lackeys take their orders from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Mary Butler: That is scandalous.

Deputy Denise Mitchell: They are still giving the two fingers to the ordinary people. I do not have confidence in Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael and I do not have confidence in the so-called Independents.

Deputy Seamus Healy: The Tánaiste and Taoiseach have left the Chamber. It is an insult to the Dáil and proof positive that not only will they not listen to the Irish people but they will not listen to TDs in this House. We have a cost-of-living crisis on top of a cost-of-living crisis, and that crisis has been deliberately worsened by Government policy, which favours the rich and powerful in our society and doubles down on the ordinary, decent working people and their families.

In the teeth of a cost-of-living crisis, the Government abolished energy credits in this year's budget. It abolished social welfare supports, leaving thousands of families worse off by up to €1,400. It hiked up income tax on PAYE workers. To add insult to injury, at the same time it gave hundreds of millions of euro to big developers and corporate landlords, and gave the guts of €690 million to the burger barons of the big fast-food chains. On top of that, the Government is presiding over a housing crisis, a disability crisis and a health crisis. Ordinary, decent, hard-working people are put to the pins of their collars to make ends meet.

In the past week, the Government's arrogance insulted, abused and threatened peaceful protestors. That threat to call in the Army was absolutely shameful.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Charles Ward.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Did the Government call in the Army to deal with the far-right violent thugs on O'Connell Street in Dublin in 2023?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, your time is up.

Deputy Seamus Healy: I have no confidence in the Government.

Deputy Charles Ward: It is a disgrace that the Tánaiste and the Taoiseach are not here.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Charles Ward: It is an absolute disgrace. It sums up their arrogance and ignorance, particularly regarding the many issues we have in Donegal. I was elected to the Dáil 17 months ago on a mandate of trying to deliver 100% redress for the people of Donegal. I have tried to engage with those in government, but it is like talking to a brick wall - pardon the pun. They do not want to listen. They do not care about the people of Donegal. They never have. We have seen people in Donegal die as a result of suicide because of defective concrete. Those in government do not give a damn about us. They have left us abandoned for many years. Fourteen years we have waited. We have had two schemes that failed, and now we have this.

Last week was the final straw when the Government turned on its citizens on the streets and put out propaganda about certain elements. People are fed up. They do not have the money to heat their houses. We in Donegal have been left abandoned for years. The Government is

absolutely at the end. In Donegal, we have had it. The people of Donegal voted for me. Today, I will vote no confidence in this Government. I urge the Independents - Lowry's group - to do the same and to do the right thing.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: It has been excruciating listening to the Government talking about misery and missed hospital appointments. The housing Minister has left the House. There is a tsunami of evictions in my constituency. Two thirds of the under-35s are living with their parents. Need I go on? This Government leaves vast wealth untapped and untouched. Eleven billionaires own 85% of the wealth in Ireland.

The protests last week were peaceful. They were certainly forceful and impactful. On the idea that critical infrastructure should be left untouched, how does the Government think we won the right to vote and other basic rights in this country? How does it think Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil were formed? The majority of people supported the protestors because someone was having a go. That was it. Although I do not have a connection with rural contractors, that was the feeling of most people. This began with the budget and continued with the package the Government brought in. It would not listen to those in opposition who said it did not deal with the fundamental problem that there is a cost-of-living crisis and that people have huge arrears in the context of their electricity bills. What has the Government introduced today to deal with that? What about home heating oil? How will people heat their homes? What about mortgage arrears, rent arrears-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: -----and all the problems facing ordinary people?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Roderic O'Gorman.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: This will not deal with the issue. Workers needs to step into action now.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: The Green Party has no confidence in the Government, and I will vote against the motion. Over the course of the past week, the actions of the Government continually made a difficult situation worse. Ministers caused confusion, unnecessarily raised tensions and ultimately failed to protect the Irish people's ability to move and go about their business for five long days. Hospital appointments were missed, emergency vehicles were delayed, people could not get to work and, vitally, access to fuel was disrupted, and continues to be.

The origins of the energy price crisis lies in our country's over-reliance on fossil fuels. The war in Iran has shown for the second time in four years how our economy is totally at the mercy of the whims of Putin, Trump and the Ayatollah. Yet, as part of its response, the Government is undermining the very actions that will reduce our dependence on foreign fossil fuels, measures like the warmer homes scheme and retrofitting. The funding for these measures has now been put at risk by the deferral of the carbon tax. Our country will remain vulnerable to energy shocks until we transition our entire economy to renewable sources of energy and across

the past 15 months, the Government has demonstrated it does not possess the belief in that transition to be able to make the case for it to the Irish people.

Deputy Paul Murphy: It looks like this Government will hang on to power for now with the votes of the Lowry lackey Independents. There is an important lesson for everyone in that. Do not trust these fake Independents. They are sheep in wolves' clothing. They are people who pretend to stand for the ordinary person, but in reality just seek to get into bed and into government with Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael. That is why we want a general election and a left-wing Government.

There is another lesson here-----

Deputy Noel Grealish: Who wants you in government?

Deputy Paul Murphy: -----and it is a lesson for those in government. The people on the streets are more powerful than the people who are supposedly in power. We have seen the power of ordinary people in the past week, and this must now be the start of a new phase of militant, effective protest involving trade unions and communities-----

(Interruptions)

Deputy Paul Murphy: -----mobilising for action on behalf of everyone in the context of the cost-of-living crisis.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: In 1913, Ireland's greatest revolutionary, James Connolly, whose statue is behind us in this building, led the Dublin working class out for a year of disruptive strike action that shut the city down. That is how the trade union movement in this country was formed. It was done in a fight against deprivation, poverty and economic inequality and because of the refusal of the rich and powerful to understand the pain, hardship and suffering that working people were enduring at the time. That is a great tradition. The people who went out protesting last week did so because the Government refused to listen to repeated calls for price controls and effective action to deal with the hardship and suffering affecting people with the cost-of-living crisis.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: They were right to protest. Protest works, and we need more protests.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The Government's handling of the fuel price issue has been appalling. It refused to listen to the Opposition. Week after week we told it what was happening. It refused to listen to the representatives of the various sectors and various bodies. I wrote to the Tánaiste in March and told him that people I had met were running at a loss and could not continue to operate as things stood.

Instead, the Government threatens ordinary working people who are trying to make a living. In Laois, it was not the far right. There was no far right involvement. It was ordinary, hard-

working people who work 60 or 70 hours per week. The Government only moved to put supports in place when the protests escalated. Then it was threatened that the army would be brought in. For what? For one Army truck to move pallets that could have been moved with a Massey Ferguson 35 with a front loader on it. There was a big hoo-ha about the Army. We thought we were going to see the Army on the streets.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Brian Stanley: Instead of listening and working towards a solution with people-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I call the Minister of State, Deputy John Cummins.

Deputy Brian Stanley: -----the Government threatened them, which was wrong-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Everybody else -----

Deputy Brian Stanley: -----and left people out. I will be voting no confidence in the Government.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy John Cummins): Let us be clear about what is happening today. At a time of real global uncertainty, when families are worried about the cost of living and when businesses are planning for an unpredictable future, the motion of no confidence is not about stability or solutions; it is about opportunism. Sinn Féin is seeking to collapse the Government because it thinks it can benefit from chaos. It offers noise but not clarity, disruption but not delivery. While Sinn Féin tries to create instability, the Government is getting on with the job at hand.

We are helping people through an array of supports and targeted measures to back workers and families through continued investment in schools, hospitals and communities. We were given a mandate to govern. We are working hard every day to deliver on that responsibility. That mandate matters and should not be cast aside lightly, just for political manoeuvring. We have never been found wanting in financial difficulties, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine war and other shocks caused by global factors. That is why we took steps to intervene prior to the Easter break and now to support our people again. It is because we recognise more needs to be done and we will do more, particularly at budget time, to support workers, families and businesses. Now is not the time for the Government to stop its work. Now is the time to continue delivering, especially on housing.

Last year, we delivered 36,000 homes. That is real progress. We are determined to build on it and not abandon it for political theatre.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Tell that to families who are homeless

Deputy John Cummins: On planning, we are simplifying the system to ensure timely decisions are made, red tape is cut and that people have a reasonable expectation of receiving

planning permission for a home, particularly in rural Ireland, where they want to continue to put down roots and support their local communities

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Paul Donnelly: The garden sheds you built.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: There is nothing new, record rents, record house prices.

Deputy John Cummins: This Government will-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Timmy Dooley): I welcome the opportunity to address the House. I was born on a small farm in east Clare. I know the struggles of my community. I know what it is like for farmers, particularly those with small farms, who have to provide for their families.

4 o'clock

That has not changed since the time I was going to school.

I live among my people. I believe nobody in this House has a monopoly on empathy and nobody has a monopoly on the understanding of the struggles faced by the rural communities. However, there has been an attempt by some this week to usurp all of the knowledge, mar dhea, of that and have sought to present those of us on this side of the House as being somewhat deficient in our capacity to understand the challenges that are being faced. Together with the Minister, Deputy Heydon, and the Ministers of State, Deputy Healy-Rae and Deputy Grealish, we have worked with our stakeholders under the Department of agriculture since the crisis began and since the price of oil has gone out of all proportions following the invasion of Iran. We continued to remain in contact with them.

It was not really a surprise to me at the weekend, as we worked through Easter and again through this weekend in trying to develop a package of supports to assist them through their most difficult time, that Sinn Féin early on Sunday decided to put down a motion of no confidence in the Government before a package of measures was even announced. I know that is how politics works and I know that is the role of the Opposition. However, I was somewhat taken, too, by the approach of Independent Ireland. Indeed, one of the Deputies, who happens to be in the House, went on public television and explained what they were letting through the various different ports. We are elected to do certain things in this House but I do not think we are elected, or that anybody has the right, to usurp the authority of the State in terms of deciding who gets what through the ports.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: Timmy do little.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Healy-Rae): I have listened to the protestors. I have listened to the workers. I have

listened to the people of Kerry - the canvassers who soldiered on long days and bad nights with me over the years. I have listened to my family and my friends, to the office staff in Kerry - Fiona and Kevin - and to the Department of agriculture people, such as Jacquie Casey and all of the people I adore. I have listened to my son Jackie, who has been my side all of the time.

I have always looked at myself as a gauge of the people of rural Ireland, and I really believe that I am. When I see people begging on the side of the road, when I see grown men crying, and last night inside in the Plough Bar when I met tractormen, lorrymen and farmers who were telling me how unhappy they were, the leader of the country should have listened. Since I believe this Government has let the people of Ireland down, I will be voting no confidence in the leader of the country and I will be tendering my resignation as a Minister of State from now.

I ask that future Governments, and this Government, listen, be kind and be understanding. There are farmers who are really suffering so much at present. There are agricultural contractors who are really suffering. There are people who cried at the protests. These were workers. These were respectable people. They are the people I have represented since the first day I started. Any day I get up, I do not mean to hurt, offend or do harm to anybody. When I canvassed in the election of 2016, people asked me in Kerry whether if I got an opportunity to go into government, would I. I said I would if the opportunity was right and it was good for the people of Kerry, but now the people of Kerry are telling me that they are unhappy with this Government. They do not want to see me or any other Healy-Rae supporting it.

I remember my late father today. He supported Governments when things were bad and things were tough. Last night before I went to bed, I asked him what I should do. The feeling I have is the Government, and its leader in particular, has not listened. It is a lesson for people-

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister of State should conclude.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Sorry, just one second. It is a lesson for people in the future. I adored being a Minister of State in the Department of agriculture because I felt I was able to do good and I was passionate about my job.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Minister of State. He has to finish.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I am sorry, and I thank you all very, very much.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Robert Troy): I do not believe the people want to see us playing Punch and Judy politics here this evening. The Government will secure a majority in the vote when the vote is taken but it would be both foolhardy and wrong for us not to acknowledge the level of fear, anxiety and frustration felt by many of the people we represent. Like many of my colleagues, I am in continuous engagement with the people whom we represent, despite what some in the Opposition might like to portray. The Government has acted. We now have a cumulative package of €750 million, one of the most comprehensive in Europe. The reason we have been able to go as far as we have, further than any other EU country, is because of the strength of our economy.

The Opposition has the luxury of coming forward with uncostered proposals that have the potential to damage our economic model. Earlier, we heard a list of what the Opposition would do but no mention of the cost of that or how that list would be funded. The root problem is there is a war in Iran and a reduction in the production and supply of oil, which has left us dealing with the most severe energy crisis of modern times. No government can alleviate all of the impacts of this but what this Government must do is trust the people, keep them informed and always work with their best interests in mind.

Minister of State at the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (Deputy Emer Higgins): As I stand here, I am really conscious of the pressures people are under. At petrol stations, people are paying more and more for their fill. At supermarket tills, people are paying more and more for groceries. The cost of living is rising and the cost of doing business is rising. That is why the Government has acted with the largest support package in the EU. For those with disabilities and their families, there is an extra layer of cost, namely, the cost of disability. That is why the Minister, Deputy Dara Calleary, is developing a framework for a specific cost-of-disability payment.

What people are feeling in their pockets, at the forecourts and at supermarket tills is a direct result of geopolitical instability. That is exactly why stability has never been as important as it is now here in Ireland - stability in government, stability in the economy and stability in our society. That is what Fine Gael in government has always provided, whether it was through Brexit, Covid or now, and we will continue to do that.

As the Minister of State with special responsibility for disability, I work day in and day out with my senior Minister, Deputy Norma Foley, to support people with disabilities and their families. We have the largest ever budget for disability services and we are working hand in hand to transform that into improved outcomes for people. Disability is our top priority but it also needs to be a priority for every Minister across Government because people do not live in Government Departments or silos. Rather, they live in communities, villages and towns around Ireland. That is why disability now sits at the heart of Government in the disability unit in the Department of the Taoiseach to drive progress for people with disabilities right across Ireland. We do that through cocreation and collaboration with people with disabilities under our national strategy for disabled people.

Deputy Pa Daly: Over the past month, we have seen the Government drop ball after ball. It has been unwilling to talk, slow to make a decision, refusing to listen and unfit for Government. When it allows a situation to run out of control, it panics and it talks about bringing in the Army and putting it on the streets and it attacks the media. The time has come for TDs to make up their minds. Do they believe the Government has handled these situations well in general? It is not just last week, since 28 February or the presidential election, but back from when the election deal was done and the carve-up was completed. Are the Government and its supporters able to deal with a crisis and react to it? We have already seen that some people are running from Government.

People do not feel supported. I have seen the proposals and the reaction to the housing crisis. There is little or no affordable housing, long waiting lists, record numbers in emergency accommodation and spiralling rents but at the same time, there are grants in the form of tax breaks to huge developers to build expensive for-rent apartments in the larger cities. Landlords

and large property owners are favoured but people need a home they can call their own. There is not enough funding for early intervention classes and ASD units, and parents of adult children with additional needs are being ignored and left to fend for themselves. Even the weakest are ignored. For years, there has been a refusal to extend the child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, compensation scheme and the boarded out children are still left behind. However, there have been plenty of statements, announcements and publicity videos that we were obliged to fact check. Were college fees reduced? No, they actually increased. Was there more money for the local improvement scheme, LIS? No, there was actually a decrease. Was there more money for roads in Kerry? Again, this was not true. Funding for local and regional roads in Kerry actually decreased by €2 million this year. It was said housing targets are being met - another lie. Energy credits were granted not because the Government believed they were effective in dealing with a cost-of-living crisis but to buy the election. After the election, there was nothing.

Earlier on, I heard the Taoiseach refer to a report today that Government measures had shielded people from energy bills. Those are the same energy credits that the Government stripped away, and we have already seen the reaction to that.

No wonder Danny Healy-Rae called for Fianna Fáil to oust the Taoiseach when you cannot believe a word that is being said.

After St. Patrick's Day, the Government reacted to the Sinn Féin pressures with a half-baked package but we knew it was too little too late. I spoke to constituents over the last week, working people angry at Government waste, two-income families, small farmers, factory workers, HSE employees, some of the 750,000 people who are using home heating oil and struggling with their energy bills. These people cannot afford electric vehicles. They cannot afford the retrofitting scheme. Now was a chance to tell people where the Government TDs stood. They should follow the lead of their colleagues in government and the advice of their former supporters, leave this Government and vote no confidence in this Government.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Collins: In the ten years since I came into the Dáil, I have never seen such a shambolic disgrace of a Government across the way. Its TDs should all be ashamed of themselves. Every one of them. They do not have the decency----

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Ah, will you stop.

Deputy Michael Collins: Do not say be saying anything to me. You ruin fisheries and you are there chanting that you are a great man-----

(Interruptions)

Deputy Michael Collins: I gave you your time to talk and I did not interfere. I travelled the country to try to make peace-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Through the Chair, the Deputy was told-----

Deputy Denise Mitchell: Ah, pipe down.

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Just wait for a minute.

Deputy Michael Collins: Sorry. I hope the Leas-Cheann Comhairle will mind the clock for me.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Government Members will have their chance to speak, if they have not already.

Deputy Michael Collins: I never interfered when they were talking. The clock is-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The clock can start again. I will not tolerate this. The Ministers of State in particular should be giving a good example.

Deputy Michael Collins: I travelled to a meeting in Portlaoise up to 20 days ago. The people there wrote to the Taoiseach. They wrote to every one of the Ministers - not just the Taoiseach, but also the Tánaiste - to try to make sure that there would be no protest, to sit down and have dialogue, and to see whether we could come to a solution for the hauliers and other sectors out there. The Government turned its back on them. We asked for a reconvening of the Dáil. It turned its back on us there, so there was no way the people of Ireland could express the concerns. Today, the Government has lost them. Today, it has lost two TDs at least. Is there an honourable Independent TD over there? There is a Minister over there who said he would bring the Army in and break up the protestors' vehicles. Good God almighty, what in the name of God is the State we are living in? Is the Government there for the people? Who elected you? The Minister of State, Deputy Canney, should show his face and stand up here with the people who elected him. His people are ringing me telling me to ask him that. That is the crisis we are in. That is the crisis the Government has left us in. He should stand with his fellow Independent who made that decision a while ago.

It was a disgraceful carry-on. The Taoiseach said we needed debate and to talk to the people. He would not talk to anyone. He said Ireland was giving the most. That is because the Government is taking the most. It is taking 65% in the fuel it takes. Parliamentary democracy? There was no democracy because the Government would not come back. It would not speak to the people. The Government gave out to Sinn Féin for a vote of no confidence before seeing the package. God damn in hell, the Government would not speak to people. What choice did we have? We are in the crisis we are in thanks to the Government.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Well done.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: The Taoiseach and Tánaiste have left the Chamber but they have also left the people of Ireland with the arrogance and the disgust they showed towards the real working people of Ireland. I have been accused of standing on a picket with the people of Ireland; I am guilty, but I stood there and negotiated with them to make sure nobody was

affected. The waterways were not affected. The farmers were not affected. The fuel was not affected because we went down and met them to hear their concerns and we actually worked with them. I have met the finest people and have friends for life, and if I had to do it all over again tomorrow, I would be with them because they are the real people of Ireland. They were from Clare, Kerry, Tipperary, Cork and Limerick and when we finished up below at 1 o'clock and said we would walk out peacefully, what did they sing? They sang "Sean South of Garryowen". There was not one dry eye there because they were real people. There were children from two years of age. I met men and women, the strongest people I have ever known and who have never wanted for anything, crying and saying that there was no future. That is what I stand for and if I am guilty of that, well, so be it, but I will do the same thing tomorrow and the day after. They said to Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael that the pen was mightier than the sword. Timmy Dolittle was mentioned at the protest. He will be gone the next time and he will never again return.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Good man, Richard. The people of Ireland have a great representative.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: This Government has let down those in plant hire, those farmers, taxi drivers, the hauliers, contractors and fishers, and the ordinary people who this Government says it represents and lives among. The reality is it has blamed Trump for absolutely everything. We have heard Government Members getting up and speaking about Trump. Donald Trump is not in charge of the National Oil Reserves Agency, NORA. He is not in charge of the carbon tax in this country. He is not in charge of VAT in this country and he is not in charge of excise. What did Seán Canney do? He told people to go out and walk or cycle. What did big Jim - James Bond himself - go out and do? He said we would turn the Army on our own citizens, which was reminiscent of something you would hear in South America. It is reminiscent of a Peronist. Then we have the man who turned away from the woman in Kanturk not so long ago during the last election and who did not want to hear, and all of a sudden he is gaslighting the country saying he is concerned about the 900,000 people on waiting lists. He is concerned about the 60,000 people on housing lists and about the 116,000 people who are waiting for housing assistance payment, HAP. That is what this Government is concerned about. It is concerned about nothing only serving itself. I applaud Deputy Healy-Rae. I say "Well done" to him for having a bit of backbone. If any of those TDs from Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael who turned up at the protests down in Whitegate or anywhere else in the country and said they were with the protestors and were going to get rid of Micheál Martin in a couple of weeks had any bit of backbone, they should join with Deputy Healy-Rae, vote against this Government and let us call the election.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: The night the first measures were announced here, a blind man would have known that when you could buy white diesel at a price within 3 cent of green diesel, the writing was on the wall. I gave a speech in here but no one would listen. It was the usual stuff. The Government TDs are on their phones, not listening to someone who comes from the sector. I have those black hands all my life with grease and oil. I know what it is to be an agricultural contractor and the Government, its civil servants and the people in here

turned around and thought they knew more. People are paying €1.70 for green diesel when your machine to cut a meadow costs the price of a house in Dublin. There are financial pressures on those contractors. But no, they will not listen.

The IFA warned the Government a week beforehand. The dog on the street knew there was discontent. What was the difference in bringing the measures in the Sunday before to try to solve this? But no, the Government TDs will not listen to the people who elected them. I have been here for a lot of debates and never in my life have I got more emails off people who were disgusted. Do you know what? I went up to the people in Galway, people who had voted for the Government parties - for Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil - every time. They are decent people, and let no one say that they are far right either.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Government is a government of chaos. It has done more damage to fuel prices in this country than the war in Iran. The intransigence of Micheál Martin and Simon Harris has actually brought this country to a standstill. Their stubbornness has seen petrol pumps run dry for the first time since the 1980s and I have never seen as much political stress on the streets since the right to water protests. The Government should not forget that its democratic authority comes from the citizens with whom it refused to converse last week. For too long, there has been an arrogance in the Government and it is pulling down the shutters between it and the people. The fact that it escalated the protest last week is unbelievable, with threats of physical force from gardaí and from the Army as well. It has kept blackening the names of those protestors since. It is incredible that we have had the Minister, Deputy Patrick O'Donovan, threaten press freedom in this country, probably the first time since Eoin O'Duffy himself. The Government is giving out about the protestors closing down businesses. These are the businesses that the Government was closing down that were protesting as well.

There is another issue here. The Government talks about people not being able to make hospital appointments. There are a million people on hospital waiting lists at the moment. There are a dozen children on scoliosis lists across the country at the moment who cannot get operations. Some of them have lost their lives because of the decisions the Government has made.

Deputy Paul Lawless: It is absolutely astounding that the Government refused to meet the protestors yet was so quick to blacken their names. In fact, every single intervention this Government made over the past number of days has added fuel to the fire. It threatened the use of the Army and the public order unit, it threatened to revoke licences and it even accused a Minister of being far right. That is not leadership; that is provocation and it is deeply wrong. The Minister for justice even called in the Army without engaging with his Fine Gael colleague and now the Government is threatening an investigation in the media for daring to even cover this protest.

Let me be very clear, this is the policy of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the ghost of the Green Party to drive up fuel. It is incremental increase after increase to the carbon tax. Last week, the Minister of State, Deputy Alan Dillon, just a few days ago when businesses were on their knees-----

Deputy Alan Dillon: Sit down, you fool.

Deputy Paul Lawless: -----outlined to the Mayo media that he was going to increase carbon tax again on 1 May. "A modest increase", is what he said, when the people were struggling. He should be listening to the people, he should be engaging with the people and he should not be blackening their name.

Deputy Alan Dillon: Good electioneering there, Paul.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: It is no surprise to hear me say that I will not be voting confidence in this Government. As I said just after the election, the Government's the programme for Government and the groups it did deals with to keep it in power did not inspire any confidence or show any vision. It's choices during the last budget favoured wealthy developers, left vulnerable people in the lurch and the Government's lack of urgency on the need to ramp up our energy security has been frustrating. People in my constituency cannot get affordable homes and those that do are consigned to congested areas with no facilities, no infrastructure, no reliable public transport services and many of them are now fighting for basic parking spaces.

I said a few weeks ago that more was needed to be help people suffering to an even greater extent during the current cost-of-living and fuel crisis, caused by Trump and Netanyahu. We know the Government did not cause the problem but it needed to listen to the people faster and be part of rapid, meaningful, short-term solutions. If the Government survives this vote I will comment on some of the wider issues in later debates, but I want to put these views on the record in a respectful way.

The Tánaiste and his colleagues are not the devil and the Opposition are no angels but, to be clear, the Government has not responded quickly enough or gone far enough.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I welcome the fact that I follow on from Independent Ireland to speak because I want to mention a group of Irish people -Irish men and women- that they never once mentioned. That is the men and women of An Garda Síochána-----

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: -----who stood by this State. I want to thank the gardaí who, over the past week showed outstanding professionalism, commitment and courage in guaranteeing the safety and security of the State and its citizens throughout the period of blockades of critical infrastructure. We all know in this House, on the Government's side, that in any liberal democracy the right to peaceful assembly, the right to express disagreement with the people who govern, is a central right. It is a right that all of us in this House support and the Constitution of this country expressly guarantees it. I have no doubt there are many people from across the country who are exercising that right due to the great concern they had for their livelihoods, and that is to be respected.

The Government has now acted to seek to address those concerns. However, let us get one thing straight in this House; the right to protest is not unlimited. Our Constitution states, "The right of the citizens to assemble peaceably" is subject to public order. What we witnessed last week at certain sites, where the blockading of fuel and goods occurred, was not a peaceful assembly in line with public order. In those circumstances An Garda Síochána were required to restore order. That is what they did and I commend them for doing so. It is a credit to the gardaí that they not only managed to remove the blockades at both ports and fuel depots in a swift manner following a number of days of engagement, but did so without any notable injury to the individuals at the blockades or any member of the force.

I also want to commend the Defence Forces, who provided assistance to An Garda Síochána in the provision of equipment required to remove vehicles forming parts of the blockade.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: What was it they removed?

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: An Garda Síochána, which Member's opposite should appreciate, has a proud record and history of defending and securing the people of Ireland and their democratic institutions from harm against those who have tried to undermine them. They did so again on this occasion and that is to be commended by everyone in this House.

I am, however, concerned about the unacceptable levels of hatred and vitriol directed at members of An Garda Síochána, sometimes in person, but mostly from faceless cowards on social media, the majority of them from outside this State. I want to put on the record of the House that harassment of members of An Garda Síochána, online or in person, will not be tolerated.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I have already spoken to the Commissioner about this and he has assured me that, where offences have been committed, prosecutions will follow.

The work of this Government in the area of justice has just begun. It is vital that work continues. As such, I commend the motion of confidence before the House.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: No apologies for threatening the Army, Jim? No apologies, no? Do you stand by it?

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: You should recognise and respect our Army. You respected another army for long enough.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: You were threatening the public with them. Do not threaten the Irish people with them. Many of the families were not happy.

Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Peter Burke): I rise to support the motion of confidence in this Government and the accumulative package of €750 million of an intervention to support citizens right across our country. I do so while acknowledging the huge pressure that many families are under, families who play by the rules

in our society. That is why this intervention, together with the one a couple of weeks ago, is very significant. When we look at the scale of it, for a fill of petrol of 60 l, for ordinary families up and down the country, we are giving €16 per fill. For diesel, we are giving €19.20 per fill and for contractors who use marked gas oil, MGO, together with the intervention negotiated with my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and the Marine, Deputy Martin Heydon, we are bringing forward €55 for every fill of MGO for workers right across the economy. Also, the Minister for Transport, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, is bringing forward a package of €40 million a week to support supply chains to ensure groceries are getting on shelves for our workers and mitigating the increases of inflation. That is the bread, the milk, that so many of our hauliers bring. That is a key mitigation factor.

There were hugely disingenuous narratives being put forward over the last week and more saying that the Government was profiting from this crisis. That is absolutely false. It is disingenuous, it is disgraceful and it should not be allowed take hold considering the measures we have introduced and we will further introduce.

The final thing I want to say is that actions have consequences. A motion of no confidence in a Government was brought forward, due to an unprecedented international crisis through the Iran shock, that would leave a country, vulnerable citizens, without a Government, without the capacity to make key interventions to support our families right across the State-----

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: We are without a Government anyway.

Deputy Peter Burke: We know one thing about the Opposition: it cannot agree on anything. We brought forward a €250 million-----

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: We agree that you are useless.

Deputy Peter Burke: ----- package here a few weeks ago and the whole Opposition could not support that. It was a simple, €250 million package-----

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Half measures.

Deputy Peter Burke: -----to support vulnerable families right across our country. It proves the point, time and time again, that the Opposition cannot agree on anything, but it wants to tear down a Government and leave the country without a Government.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: You just had a resignation.

Deputy Peter Burke: The key thing that shows this is the motion that Sinn Féin brings forward today. How does it solve a complex problem?

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: If I ran my business like you I would not be in business.

Deputy Peter Burke: Look at the one line in the Sinn Féin motion that says, "take maximum action necessary to cut fuel prices". My God, what a shambles.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: Exactly, that is what you are. That is what you are.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Thomas Byrne): Sé sheachtain ó shin, dhúisigh muid go léir san Eoraip agus trasna an domhain le radharc nua is drámata de bhuamaí agus cogadh sa Mheánoirthear. Dá bharr seo, tá taithí ag gach tír san Eoraip le méadú ar phraghas an ola mar aon le ganntanas. Baineann sé seo le gach duine. Tá sé seo ag tarlú na mílte míle ón tír seo, ach tá éifeacht láidir aige ar phobal, ar ghnóthaí agus ar theaghlaigh na hÉireann. Mar Aire Stáit a bhfuil freagrachtaí na ngnóthaí Eorpacha orm, tá a fhios agam, ó bheith ag labhairt le mo chomhghleacaithe Eorpacha, nach bhfuil Éire léi féin sa ghéarchéim seo. San Aontas Eorpach, tá an pacáiste is cuimsithí agus is mó de thacaíocht airgeadais ar fáil in Éirinn ná mar atá in aon tír in Eoraip chun cabhrú le teaghlaigh agus le ghnóthaí Éireannacha déileáil leis an ngéarchéim. Is é seo an pacáiste is suntasaí, is cuimsithí agus is mó san Eoraip. Má éiríonn le rún Shinn Féin, ní bheidh deis ag an Dáil an pacáiste seo a chur i bhfeidhm.

A bhuí leis an mBunreacht, is tír daonlathach muid. Chonaic muid an tseachtain seo san Ungáir an bua ar Viktor Orbán. Chuir sé na polasaithe de shaghas Independent Ireland i bhfeidhm, ag dul ar aghaidh agus ag iarraidh gach rud a dhéanamh chun freagraí simplí a thabhairt do mhuintir na tíre sin. Is rogha don tír seo é an damáiste a rinne sé don Ungáir a bheith ag tabhairt na bhfreagraí simplí sin. Is é an dearcadh a bheidh againn ná, uaireanta, bíonn na fadhbanna seo an-deacair agus ba cheart dúinn díospóireacht iomlán a bheith againn sa Dáil agus i measc an Rialtais faoin mbealach ar féidir linn déileáil le fadhbanna na tíre seo. Is tír daonlathach muid. Ba mhaith liom freisin aontú go hiomlán leis an Aire dlí agus cirt as gach a rinne sé le linn na seachtaine seo caite.

(Interruptions)

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor): We are facing a global crisis in the supply and the cost of fuel. This is the reality here in the Chamber. The situation in Iran is unpredictable. Nobody knows. It is global. The Government did introduce the package aimed at easing the impact of the cost-of-living increases with cuts to excise on fuel and further supports for those to get their fuel allowance.

This was only ever going to be the first package of supports, and I welcome the further packages announced by the Government this week. The total package of over €750 million is the largest in the EU.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: They were not taking as much tax in the EU.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: The Government is really showing support. It wants to work with our hauliers, our farmers, our agricultural contractors and our bus operators. It is important that people have certainty, particularly those involved in businesses and who are the hardest hit.

I know that some are struggling. We all know that. Some people in my constituency of Carlow-Kilkenny have come to me over the past few days about the cost of heating oil, and that is a concern. This is why it was important to delay the increase in the carbon tax-----

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Ah, Jesus Christ almighty.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: -----and I understand more supports are needed.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Come on.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I spoke-----

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: The Minister of State does not know.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I spoke to my colleague, the Minister, Deputy Dara Calleary, today-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Quiet, please.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: There are supports for energy bills there through the local enterprise offices-----

(Interruptions)

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: -----but the Deputies do not want to hear that.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: The Minister of State does not know what she is talking about.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: Why would they not want people to get help and support?

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Quiet, please.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: The Minister of State-----

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Quiet, please.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: Let her speak.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: As a Minister of State in the Department of Health, there are real concerns. We had several meetings over the past week. We were working as well.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: The Government was forced to have several meetings by the people of Ireland.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: We had several meetings. We had meetings with the Department-----

(Interruptions)

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: We have seen the impact-----

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Allow the Minister of State to speak.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: We had people waiting to go to hospital appointments and people waiting to get their cancer treatment and we were making sure there was fuel to get nurses and carers to the homes where they needed to be.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: This is about everybody working together.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: No. It is about you working together against the Irish people.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: As I said, we all need to work together-----

(Interruptions)

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: -----to sort this out. We need to help those most vulnerable people in Ireland with all of us working together but-----

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: The Government has forgotten the most vulnerable in Ireland.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: We are absolutely working.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Chair.

Deputy Jen Cummins: Chair.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Chair, a bit of order.

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Mairéad Farrell.

(Interruptions)

A Deputy: Bully the women. That is it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Hold on.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: A bit of order, Chair.

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Just have some order, please.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: It is coming from that corner.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I ask the Deputies to give the speaker a chance to address the House.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: Out of respect for the Chair.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Yes.

(Interruptions)

A Deputy: That is disgraceful.

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Mairéad Farrell.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: People took to the streets in a way that we have not seen before. People left their homes, their families and their livelihoods to stand up for themselves and for their communities, demanding a better Ireland, and how dare the Government ignore the people again here today. The Government talks about Sinn Féin but it does not talk about the people. It was the people who went out and said enough was enough. It was the people who had to take to the streets to demand action and it was the people who said they have no confidence in the Government.

A Deputy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Not one of the Ministers here spoke to the people today. Instead, they spoke to and about themselves. The Government has in no way heard the message that came from the people of Ireland, a message that they could not have given to the Government any louder or any clearer. Coming in here today, I had thought that maybe a little bit of humble pie had been eaten after the arrogance of last week but, no, I was completely mistaken. Nothing has changed. All of this, of course, happened because the Government refused to talk, refused to engage, refused to listen and refused to act. The Government refused to represent people like they demanded it represent them.

When I thought about the Government's disastrous response last week, I thought it could not get any worse. The fact that it locked Galway representatives out of a meeting is absolutely shameful. Does the Government even realise how disrespectful that was? Does it understand the blind arrogance that it showed? It was like something out of a schoolyard. The Government was saying it would talk to some people but not to them. It was absolutely and utterly unbelievable.

I spoke to people in Galway, to people who were at the protest and to other Galwegians who were not at the protests but who were vehemently supportive of the protesters' demands. All those people said to me that it is time for this Government to go. It is a Government so immune to the realities of its people. Having spent time on these protests in Galway, I had perhaps thought that a sense of clarity might have descended on this Dáil, a sense of clarity that the people had, but obviously this has not happened.

The Government has doubled down. It has spent its time during this debate with its chest out and beating the same old drum of how great it is but the people are wise to it. They know exactly what it is at. They heard the words of the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and the Minister for justice last week, words that showed how out of touch they are with the realities of people's lives and the contempt they show for the realities of people's lives. They have shown a lack of awareness of the struggles of ordinary working people, these struggles they face daily. I will tell the Government now that the people know whose side it is on and they know it is not on their side.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Well said.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Lowry: I am not going to shout but I would like to be heard. This has been a very difficult week for the country and its citizens. People are suffering and under enormous financial pressure due to the cost-of-living increases in the price of fuel due to the war in Iran. It has to be acknowledged that all of us across Government failed to respond effectively in a timely fashion and failed to listen and understand the extent of people's worry and frustration. We all have encountered anger, resentment and outright hostility, which, in my view, arises from indecision, slow intervention and failure of communications.

The protest started out with many aggrieved, hard-working, decent and respectable people who were worried sick about their future. It was later infiltrated by undesirables whose only agenda was to cripple the country and bring down the Government. Over the past week, as Independents, we have used our influence for the introduction of specific financial supports for

key sectors of the economy, such as haulage, distribution, logistics, school transport, bus operators, farmers and agricultural contractors. In particular, I am happy that sole traders in these sectors can access the support funds. Our Independents, together with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael backbenchers, battled strongly and successfully for a reduction in the Government tax take on fuels and the deferment of the planned increase in carbon tax. This gives a measure of respite at the pumps for the general public who depend on fuel for their daily activities.

While the country faces the most serious crisis in recent history, with oil supplies disrupted in the Middle East, energy markets in turmoil, there are those in our political system who shamefully are looking to exploit the situation for their own benefit, rather than provide solutions to us to get through this dangerous time. Sinn Féin, and others on the left, have inflamed a very volatile situation. They wanted to cause the country further suffering in a point scoring exercise against the Government.

I want to put this on the record today. Sinn Féin is the most hollow, cynical-----

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Ah, give over.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: So says the corrupt politician in the corner.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Michael Lowry: -----destructive political imposters we have ever witnessed.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: We will take up the violin for you, will we?

(Interruptions)

Deputy Michael Lowry: Let me repeat. Sinn Féin is the most hollow, cynical-----

(Interruptions)

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Cynical?

Deputy Michael Lowry: -----and destructive political imposters I or this State have ever witnessed.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: The last time the Deputy was on those benches, he was taking backhanders.

Deputy Michael Lowry: While the Government works for the Irish people, Sinn Féin uses their hardship as a political weapon.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Michael Lowry: It seized on this moment because it has nothing else to offer other than contrived outrage.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Ah, give over.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Michael Lowry: They are performers on stage. Time and again, they have proved they have no ability to govern, no ideas and no credibility.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Seriously.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: With a straight face.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Every one of them voted to censure you because of the corruption.

Deputy Michael Lowry: In a moment of global instability-----

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please, Deputies. I call Deputy Lowry.

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Doherty, please.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: Lads, everyone has a right to speak, even if you do not like them.

Deputy Michael Lowry: In a moment of global instability, when we need responsibility, unity and a collective effort, Sinn Féin has chosen division, disruption and political opportunism. To bring down a Government at a time like this would have far-reaching consequences for the Irish people. Legislation would stall, vital supports would be delayed and the certainty families, workers and businesses desperately need would be thrown into limbo.

Disruption has been Sinn Féin's *modus operandi* from the very beginning of this Government. From the day this coalition has been formed, it sought to undermine and sabotage it for the sake of its own political advantage. It is a group of people who would rather see other people fail than build something positive themselves.

Then, of course, we had the usual from Sinn Féin. It followed the usual social media hit list. Politicians were named and targeted for the Sinn Féin army of online bots.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Michael Lowry: They were directed to target, pile on and to encourage others to mount verbal assaults. Is this what is taught in Sinn Féin? This is no way to act in a democracy.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Cop yourself on.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Is this a comedy? Maybe he will do stand-up next week?

Deputy Michael Lowry: Again this week I have seen Deputy Tóibín, for whom I have huge respect, drop the mask of pious virtue and show his true colours. He egged on frustrated people to harass and intimidate and posted the names and numbers of representatives in our Independent group. This form of intimidation is not acceptable in a democratic society.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Talking to citizens is not intimidation.

Deputy Michael Lowry: This is a time when Ireland needs-----

(Interruptions)

Deputy Michael Lowry: This kind of toxic politics is doing real damage.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: You have some nerve to utter the term "toxic politics" - this from the person adjudged to be the most corrupt individual in Irish political life.

Deputy Michael Lowry: It is discouraging thoughtful, talented young people from stepping forward to serve their communities. The Opposition is poisoning the well of potential candidates. This is a time when Ireland needs the best and brightest to help shape our future.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: This is beyond comedy at this stage.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill.

Deputy Michael Lowry: Let me say today, as an elected representative-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Lowry should conclude.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Time is up, Deputy Lowry.

Deputy Michael Lowry: -----I have no confidence in Sinn Féin. I have no confidence in your ability to-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: How dare you.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: You do not get to vote on that-----

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Lowry, please conclude.

Deputy Michael Lowry: I will be voting confidence in the Government, confidence in our country and confidence in our people.

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Resume your seat, Deputy Lowry.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Sit down.

A Deputy: The Chair needs to get a hold here.

Minister for Health (Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill): Today we stand here for respectful debate on behalf of the people we represent at a time of maximum geopolitical uncertainty. It is impacting globally and it is impacting our people. We know that, we see that and we feel that because we are elected representatives in a small, democratic State and we are connected to our people. We know in Ireland we are more impacted than so many others because of the small and deeply internationally interconnected nature of the very stable and successful State that, together, everyone with every perspective has built. This means two things: we have to continue to protect the stable strength of our people and we have to move to defend the country's weaknesses. We know we have to keep our people's lights on without dependence on abroad and without the price shocks we have seen from the actions of totally unpredictable players. The time, if it ever existed, for objecting to the development of our infrastructure, however politely, is now long gone. Energy security is central to the functioning of our society. We have seen that this week. Fortunately, we are a small island in the North Atlantic so we can build it, and we can build it well. We have built this State together on predictability, stability and consensus in our courts, in our social partnership and in our democracy. As Minister for Health, I thank all of those who turned up to provide a stable and predictable health service for our patients in the face of real difficulty last week. Those who work in our healthcare face challenges turning up to work and doing their job, but they turned up and kept clinics open longer for patients who themselves had difficulty getting there. They turned up for each other and I thank them.

As a public representative, I embrace protest. In our democracy, I welcome protest. I will defend it and freedom of expression for all. These are parts of our constitutional politics. We fund civic society in this House in many ways to enable an even more vibrant civic debate. However, when protest flips and steps across to become something else - to risking deliveries of chemotherapies in our hospitals, as it did, to risking timely deliveries of refrigerated medicines and blocking people getting to time-sensitive medical appointments like cancer treatments and dialysis, that is not protest that we enable and embrace. That is something I do not believe our very decent people and our very decent society want us to make any part of this State.

We may now have to face even bigger challenges ahead because of the continuing instability in the Middle East. We have to decide now to protect the strength and the stability we have created together and protect ourselves from the type of crossing over of protest that we saw last week. When this is finished, we will all go back as Ministers to our Departments, except for the Minister of State, Deputy Healy-Rae, to whom I pay tribute for his contribution and hard

work on behalf of the Government and the Independent group more broadly. I know the Minister, Deputy Heydon, will speak to that. The Ministers of State, Deputies Butler, Murnane O'Connor and O'Donnell, and I will go back to the Department of Health to work on behalf of the people, to expand capacity, improve access and support the people who are delivering our health service on all days no matter what.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Mary Butler): We have heard a lot from Sinn Féin and Independent Ireland about ordinary hard-working people. They say this Government will not listen to hard-working people. They say this Government has lost touch with hard-working people. They seem to think they have a monopoly on hard-working people. Well, I am a hardworking person. I worked a counter and managed a family retail business for 17 years, through good times and bad. My family are hard-working people. Since the day he started working shifts at the age of 16, my husband has worked on the ground for 44 years. I come from a community of hard-working people in Portlaw. I got into politics to represent ordinary hard-working people.

Last week, Sinn Féin and Independent Ireland shamefully blurred the lines between peaceful protests and illegal blockades. Peaceful protest is a cherished-----

A Deputy: How dare you say that?

Deputy Michael Collins: That is a disgrace.

Deputy Mary Butler: -----cornerstone of our democracy and always will be. It is one of the many rights we enjoy in a free society. Sinn Féin and other agitators on the Opposition benches try to frame the illegal blockades of critical public infrastructure as a legitimate form of protest.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Minister of State is digging a hole.

Deputy Mary Butler: Members of Independent Ireland used wardens to determine who got healthcare in Limerick hospital.

A Deputy: And what happened?

A Deputy: That is incorrect.

Deputy Mary Butler: Sandra Broderick, the regional executive officer of HSE Mid West, had to issue correspondence to politicians to allow people who did not have their appointment letter in the car to access the hospital.

Last week, Sinn Féin publicly endorsed illegal blockades which infringed upon the fundamental rights of ordinary hard-working people in this country. Sinn Féin supported hard borders on this island of Ireland - the ultimate hypocrisy. These discriminatory blockades threatened fuel supplies and food security. They denied free movement and they denied access to healthcare for ordinary hard-working citizens throughout this Republic. I witnessed it first

hand as a Minister. The illegal blockade supported by Sinn Féin and Independent Ireland meant ambulances had to determine and triage who they answered to.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: That is not true.

Deputy Michael Collins: We never blocked anything. Even the Minister of State cannot---
--

(Interruptions)

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: The Minister of State is not listening.

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister of State should conclude.

Deputy Mary Butler: Elderly people in west Clare were denied home care.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the Minister, Deputy Heydon. I thank the Minister of State.

Deputy Mary Butler: I sat with a family whose 12 hours of support at the weekend for a child who is autistic were reduced because the people did not have petrol in their car to visit. That is the reality of Independent Ireland and Sinn Féin.

A Deputy: The Minister of State should check out what-----

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Some families are waiting 12 years for help for their disabled children. They are waiting 12 years, not 12 hours.

(Interruptions)

A Deputy: The Deputies only shout over women in this Chamber. They only shout over women. I will ask-----

A Deputy: She is right.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Michael Collins: I never blocked anything.

A Deputy: It is a disgrace.

Deputy Michael Collins: That is all that was needed to negotiate. You should have done the same if you were representing your people. Shame on you.

A Deputy: Chair, they had their slot.

Deputy Michael Collins: We came into the Dáil in Independent Ireland-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Collins, resume your seat. You will be asked to leave the Chamber.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Sit down.

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Collins, resume your seat.

Deputy Michael Collins: Sorry. I will.

Deputy Helen McEntee: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle, if they do not want to listen to the women of the Dáil-----

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We want to listen to everyone. Please.

A Deputy: They are only shouting down women.

A Deputy: They shout over every one of the women. It is an absolute disgrace.

A Deputy: It is shameful.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: It is so obvious it is only the women.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please. I ask Deputies to please respect the speakers.

Deputy Michael Collins: The Minister of State was misleading the Dáil and that needed to be corrected.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: They listened to Deputy Collins. I ask him to listen to everyone who is making a contribution. This is a democracy, as he said.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Two minutes of this debate have been lost as a result of this interruption.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Martin Heydon): I regret the decision of Michael Healy-Rae today. I acknowledge his role as Minister of State with responsibility for forestry and as a good colleague in the Department of agriculture over the past 15 months.

As a sector, we in agriculture face plenty of challenges. It is my job to fight for and defend agriculture in the best interests of our farmers, fishers and agrifood sector and because of its importance to our overall economy, and in particular our rural economy. I do this in my Department and at Cabinet and with the support of my colleagues across government. This Government recognises the vital role our farmers, fishers, foresters and farm contractors play across Ireland. The vulnerability of our farmers and fishers to a massive energy shock has greatly concerned us all. However, with Government support, our agrifood sector will endure.

We grew up as young children on our farms being told there would be no future in farming, because of the impending Maastricht reforms of the early 1990s, but farming endured. We were told that the Fischler reforms, greening, Covid, Brexit and the high cost of imports following the Ukrainian war were each going to be the end of the world for agriculture. However, farming endured and continued, and it will continue to do so into the future with the support of the Government, like it has in the past.

We recognise the exceptional pressure that rising fuel costs are placing on our agrifood sector at such a crucial time of the year. I have heard it from friends, neighbours and in my ongoing engagements with representative bodies. Green diesel has almost doubled in price, from less than €1 per litre, in a matter of weeks, right at the time when farmers and contractors are in the middle of spring work and facing into a busy silage season. That is why this Government has approved a substantial package of support. It includes the full removal of all non-carbon excise on green diesel, totalling 7.5 cent per litre, and a further support of 20 cent a litre through a €100 million fuel subsidy support scheme for farmers and farm contractors. This support of 27.4 cent a litre will be to the benefit of both farmers and contractors, recognising their central role in sustaining essential food production. This is about much more than just one sector. It is about support for every citizen in this State because when input costs rise, it puts pressure on the price and availability of food for all consumers.

Energy shocks without support would lead to significant inflation, particularly in respect of food, on which we all depend. Unchecked, it would have a direct impact on the cost of living for all.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Minister.

Deputy Martin Heydon: By supporting the agrifood sector and our hauliers and all those reliant on fuel who play a role in getting food from farm to fork, we support everyone.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister should conclude.

Deputy Martin Heydon: We have a choice to make here. Those in opposition can attempt to either dismiss or ignore these supports and try to prevent their introduction or they can choose to engage with me and my Department on their roll-out to those who need them most. The choice is theirs.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien.

Deputy Martin Heydon: I do note that the bully boys in the corner never said a word when I was speaking, unlike their interventions when my female ministerial colleagues were speaking.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister, Deputy O'Brien.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I obviously want to support the motion of confidence in the Government. I want to commence my remarks by thanking the Garda, our bus drivers, the public sector, and all the front-line workers who had to put up with a lot over the last week or so. I am a TD in Dublin. I and all my colleagues on the Government side know our constituents. We understand the difficulties that people have and the pressures they are under. We also understand that this is a global crisis. We here in Ireland are grappling with a global crisis, as is every other country in the world.

I actually despair today, again, to listen to some of the political discourse that has been a political pantomime. What we have seen from some, though not all, in the Opposition is them abrogating their responsibilities as TDs and legislators here. They have a responsibility to work together to help our people and our country through this unprecedented crisis. On 25 March, when we brought the first package of measures forward, all of the Opposition, with the exception of the main Opposition party, voted against every excise cut that day. They voted against the actual support-----

Deputy Pearse Doherty: That is not true. On a point of order-----

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: They voted against the whole system-----

Deputy Pearse Doherty: On a point of order, we tabled an amendment and you voted against it. That is why the people took to the street. Just get your facts correct.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Níl mé ag éisteacht leis an fear-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Continue, Deputy O'Brien. There is no point of order.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Point of order. You are telling fibs here.

Deputy Máire Devine: Withdraw that remark.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: What I would say is that is a fact. Check the record.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: It is not a fact. Sorry, you cannot make up your own facts.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is no point of order.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle, we put forward the proposal to reduce it with the first vote that day. They voted against it. We would not accept their half measures and that is why people rolled up. That is why people took to the streets.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is no point of order, Deputy Doherty.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Correct the Dáil record.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Tell the truth.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I will move on, in the interests of this. What I have heard-----

Deputy Máire Devine: Say sorry.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: That I am not. What we have heard here from Pearse and others is an example of Sinn Féin's behaviour today. What we have heard from some on those benches, though not all, has been literally despicable. What they have done is that any time a female Deputy or Minister stood up here they shouted them down. Ken O'Flynn should have a look back at what he has done. What I am conscious of is the people outside, the very people we all represent, who are really concerned about what is happening all the way across the world and in this country, about how they pay their electricity bills, about how they put food in the table and whether they will keep their jobs. If they are looking in at this debate today and some of the behaviour, the misogynistic behaviour, the nasty-----

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: That is absolute rubbish and you know it is rubbish.

Deputy Máire Devine: How many female TDs do you have sitting on that side?

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: The nasty and vicious-----

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: Do not be calling me misogynistic-----

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: The nasty and vicious language-----

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: -----after the way your party treated me.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please, Deputy.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: It was homophobic. The whole lot of ye.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: It was nasty-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister, Deputy O'Brien.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: You stop telling lies about me and I will stop telling the truth about you.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle, if I may proceed.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Go ahead, Minister.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I think that none of us in government, and I hope none of you in opposition, have failed to grasp the gravity of the global crisis that we are in. It behoves all of us to do everything we can to protect our citizens, our businesses and the vulnerable as best we can. Are we going to be able to resolve every problem that is visited upon our citizens through one or two packages of financial support? No, we are not, but we are doing our level best to assist. To be fair to some members of the Opposition, I listened to contributions from the Labour Party, the Social Democrats and others such as Deputy Paul Gogarty. There are people who are actually really trying to put forward cases and ideas and, yes, to criticise the Government constructively, which is fine, or not to do so. Then I look at the main Opposition party, however. What did it actually bring forward? The Minister, Deputy Peter Burke, mentioned one line from the Sinn Féin motion referring to do everything we can on energy prices. Sin an méid.

The fact of the matter is-----

Deputy Pearse Doherty: That is nonsense.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Absolute nonsense. That is wilful nonsense.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: This will be my final question. This evening we will bring forward financial resolutions to cut fuel bills and to bring forward measures, such as for the road hauliers, which is €40 million per month in support. The question, and it will be on the Dáil record, will be who will support that and who will actually vote for it.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: How much more time does he get?

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I think-----

Deputy Pearse Doherty: We have an amendment that will actually do the business.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I am not going to be shouted down by Pearse Doherty, who is a late bloomer to democracy-----

Deputy Pearse Doherty: A late bloomer to democracy? I took your party to the High Court because you denied democracy. Micheál Martin was found guilty in the High Court of trying to stop the people of Ireland having a by-election. Do not lecture me about democracy-----

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: The arrogance and smugness of the Minister-----

(Interruptions)

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: We have very serious matters to deal with in this House-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Seriously, do we, Darragh?

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: -----and measures to bring forward to support our people. I hope-----

Deputy Thomas Gould: Every house in the country has serious matters to deal with.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I hope that those on the Opposition side will discharge their responsibilities appropriately and stop trying to just consistently score political points. They could not care less about the people.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Is that it? The comedy is over.

Question put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 92; Níl, 78; 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.	Cairns, Holly.	
Burke, Colm.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Peter.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Butler, Mary.	Collins, Michael.	
Butterly, Paula.	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.	

Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Chambers, Jack.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Clendennen, John.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Collins, Niall.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Connolly, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cummins, John.	Gould, Thomas.	
Currie, Emer.	Graves, Ann.	
Daly, Martin.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Healy-Rae, Michael.	
Dolan, Albert.	Healy, Seamus.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Hearne, Rory.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kelly, Alan.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Foley, Norma.	Kenny, Martin.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Geoghegan, James.	Lawless, Paul.	
Grealish, Noel.	Lawlor, George.	
Harkin, Marian.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Harris, Simon.	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.	
Martin, Micheál.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Maxwell, David.	Nolan, Carol.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
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.	
McGuinness, John.	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.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Connor, James.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Donovan, Patrick.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

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

Question declared carried.

Financial Resolution No. 1: Mineral Oil Tax

An Ceann Comhairle: We now move to financial resolutions from the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance. Before I call on the Tánaiste to open the debate, I wish to remind members that there are three separate motions being debated in this slot, namely those relating to Financial Resolutions Nos. 1 to 3, inclusive. The motions will be moved separately, debated together and decided by separate questions. I call on the Tánaiste to move the first motion and open the debate. The opening speaking slot is for ten minutes.

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

(1) THAT for the purposes of the tax charged by virtue of section 95 of the Finance Act 1999 (No. 2 of 1999), that Act be amended, with effect as on and from 15 April 2026—

(a) by the substitution of the following for Schedule 2 to that Act:

"SCHEDULE 2

RATES OF MINERAL OIL TAX

	Light Oil:		Heavy Oil:						Liquefied Petroleum Gas:		
With effect as on	Petrol	Aviation gasoline	Used as a propellant	Used for air navigation	Used for private pleasure navigation	Kerosene used other than as a propellant	Fuel oil	Other heavy oil	Used as a propellant	Other liquefied petroleum gas	Vehicle gas:
10 March 2022	€474.11	€474.11	€413.51	€413.51	€413.51	€84.84	€118.01	€120.55	€118.27	€54.68	€9.36
1 April 2022	€465.98	€465.98	€405.38	€405.38	€405.38	€84.84	€118.01	€120.55	€118.27	€54.68	€9.36
1 May 2022	€465.98	€465.98	€405.38	€405.38	€405.38	€103.83	€141.12	€111.14	€130.52	€66.93	€9.36
12 October 2022	€483.34	€483.34	€425.45	€425.45	€425.45	€103.83	€141.12	€111.14	€130.52	€66.93	€9.36
1 May 2023	€483.34	€483.34	€425.45	€425.45	€425.45	€122.83	€164.23	€131.47	€142.76	€79.17	€9.36
1 June 2023	€532.12	€532.12	€466.10	€466.10	€466.10	€122.83	€164.23	€140.28	€142.76	€79.17	€9.36
1 September 2023	€589.03	€589.03	€506.75	€506.75	€506.75	€122.83	€164.23	€149.09	€142.76	€79.17	€9.36
11 October 2023	€606.39	€606.39	€526.83	€526.83	€526.83	€122.83	€164.23	€149.09	€142.76	€79.17	€9.36
1 April 2024	€638.91	€638.91	€551.22	€551.22	€551.22	€122.83	€164.23	€163.96	€142.76	€79.17	€9.36
1 May 2024	€638.91	€638.91	€551.22	€551.22	€551.22	€141.82	€187.34	€184.30	€155.01	€91.42	€10.13
1 August 2024	€671.43	€671.43	€575.61	€575.61	€575.61	€141.82	€187.34	€199.17	€155.01	€91.42	€10.13
9 October 2024	€688.78	€688.78	€595.68	€595.68	€595.68	€141.82	€187.34	€199.17	€155.01	€91.42	€10.13
1 May 2025	€688.78	€688.78	€595.68	€595.68	€595.68	€160.81	€210.45	€219.50	€167.25	€103.66	€11.48

8 October 2025	€706. 14	€706.1 4	€615.76	€615.76	€615.76	€160.81	€210. 45	€219. 50	€167.25	€103.66	€11.4 8
25 March 2026	€584. 18	€584.1 8	€453.15	€453.15	€453.15	€160.81	€210. 45	€193. 06	€167.25	€103.66	€11.4 8
15 April 2026	€502. 88	€502.8 8	€371.85	€371.85	€371.85	€160.81	€210. 45	€172. 14	€167.25	€103.66	€11.4 8
1 August 2026	€706. 14	€706.1 4	€615.76	€615.76	€615.76	€160.81	€210. 45	€219. 50	€167.25	€103.66	€11.4 8
14 October 2026	€723. 49	€723.4 9	€635.83	€635.83	€635.83	€179.81	€233. 57	€239. 83	€179.49	€115.90	€12.8 4
1 May 2027	€723. 49	€723.4 9	€635.83	€635.83	€635.83	€198.80	€256. 68	€260. 16	€191.74	€128.15	€14.2 0
13 October 2027	€740. 85	€740.8 5	€655.90	€655.90	€655.90	€198.80	€256. 68	€260. 16	€191.74	€128.15	€14.2 0
1 May 2028	€740. 85	€740.8 5	€655.90	€655.90	€655.90	€217.80	€279. 79	€280. 49	€203.98	€140.39	€15.5 6
11 October 2028	€758. 21	€758.2 1	€675.98	€675.98	€675.98	€217.80	€279. 79	€280. 49	€203.98	€140.39	€15.5 6
1 May 2029	€758. 21	€758.2 1	€675.98	€675.98	€675.98	€236.79	€302. 90	€300. 83	€216.23	€152.64	€16.9 1
10 October 2029	€773. 25	€773.2 5	€693.38	€693.38	€693.38	€236.79	€302. 90	€300. 83	€216.23	€152.64	€16.9 1
1 May 2030	€773. 25	€773.2 5	€693.38	€693.38	€693.38	€253.25	€322. 93	€318. 45	€226.84	€163.25	€18.0 9

Rates per 1,000 litres

Rates per 1,000 litres

Rates per 1,000 litres

and from:

Rate per megawatt hour at gross calorific value

",

and

(b) by the substitution of the following for Schedule 2A to that Act (as amended by section 27(2)(d) of the Finance Act 2020 (No. 26 of 2020)):

"SCHEDULE 2A**Carbon Charge**

	Light Oil:		Heavy Oil:						Liquefie d		
--	---------------	--	---------------	--	--	--	--	--	---------------	--	--

									Petroleum Gas:		
With effect as on and from:	Petrol	Aviation Gasoline	Used as a propellant	Used for air navigation	Used for private pleasure navigation	Kerosene used other than as a propellant	Fuel oil	Other heavy oil	Used as a propellant	Other liquefied petroleum gas	Vehicle gas:
1 May 2021	€77.52	€77.52	€89.66	€89.66	€89.66	€84.84	€103.23	€90.81	€54.68	€54.68	€6.06
13 October 2021	€94.87	€94.87	€109.74	€109.74	€109.74	€84.84	€103.23	€90.81	€54.68	€54.68	€6.06
1 May 2022	€94.87	€94.87	€109.74	€109.74	€109.74	€103.83	€126.34	€111.14	€66.93	€66.93	€7.41
12 October 2022	€112.23	€112.23	€129.81	€129.81	€129.81	€103.83	€126.34	€111.14	€66.93	€66.93	€7.41
1 May 2023	€112.23	€112.23	€129.81	€129.81	€129.81	€122.83	€149.45	€131.47	€79.17	€79.17	€8.77
11 October 2023	€129.59	€129.59	€149.89	€149.89	€149.89	€122.83	€149.45	€131.47	€79.17	€79.17	€8.77
1 May 2024	€129.59	€129.59	€149.89	€149.89	€149.89	€141.82	€172.56	€151.81	€91.42	€91.42	€10.13
9 October 2024	€146.94	€146.94	€169.96	€169.96	€169.96	€141.82	€172.56	€151.81	€91.42	€91.42	€10.13
1 May 2025	€146.94	€146.94	€169.96	€169.96	€169.96	€160.81	€195.67	€172.14	€103.66	€103.66	€11.48
8 October 2025	€164.30	€164.30	€190.04	€190.04	€190.04	€160.81	€195.67	€172.14	€103.66	€103.66	€11.48
14 October 2026	€181.65	€181.65	€210.11	€210.11	€210.11	€179.81	€218.79	€192.47	€115.90	€115.90	€12.84
1 May 2027	€181.65	€181.65	€210.11	€210.11	€210.11	€198.80	€241.90	€212.80	€128.15	€128.15	€14.20
13 October 2027	€199.01	€199.01	€230.18	€230.18	€230.18	€198.80	€241.90	€212.80	€128.15	€128.15	€14.20

1 May 2028	€199.01	€199.01	€230.18	€230.18	€230.18	€217.80	€265.01	€233.13	€140.39	€140.39	€15.56
11 October 2028	€216.37	€216.37	€250.26	€250.26	€250.26	€217.80	€265.01	€233.13	€140.39	€140.39	€15.56
1 May 2029	€216.37	€216.37	€250.26	€250.26	€250.26	€236.79	€288.12	€253.47	€152.64	€152.64	€16.91
10 October 2029	€231.41	€231.41	€267.66	€267.66	€267.66	€236.79	€288.12	€253.47	€152.64	€152.64	€16.91
1 May 2030	€231.41	€231.41	€267.66	€267.66	€267.66	€253.25	€308.15	€271.09	€163.25	€163.25	€18.09

Rates per 1,000 litres

Rates per 1,000 litres

Rates per 1,000 litres

Rate per megawatt hour at gross calorific value

".

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

In accordance with what the Ceann Comhairle said, I will later move the other two financial resolutions. I will begin by outlining the detail of the most recent actions which have been taken by the Government to endeavour to support people through what is an extraordinarily challenging time and an extraordinary energy shock. These decisions that we are putting before the Dáil this evening will reduce the cost burden at the petrol pump, support those most at risk of energy poverty and assist key sectors that are critical to keeping our economy moving.

Financial Resolution No. 1 provides for the extension of the excise rate reductions which were introduced in March and which are due to run until 31 July. It also introduces a further reduction in excise rates, bringing the overall level of excise reduction to 30 cent per litre for auto diesel, 25 cent per litre for petrol and 5.4 cent per litre for marked gas oil, MGO, in addition to the specific agricultural package that the Minister, Deputy Heydon, has brought in. All of these are on a VAT inclusive basis with the reduction in the National Oil Reserves Agency, NORA, levy pending further relief. Financial Resolution No. 1 defers the 1 May carbon tax increase on MGO, kerosene, heating oil and other relevant fuels until 14 October next.

Financial Resolution No. 2 provides for the deferral for the planned 1 May increase on natural gas carbon tax, also until 14 October. Financial Resolution No. 3 provides for the delay of a planned 1 May increase on solid fuel carbon tax, also until 14 October.

As we stated at the outset of our response to this fuel crisis, our initial package of measures in March was temporary and targeted. At the time, we also stated that it was a first step and that the Government would continue to monitor and review this situation on an ongoing basis and would respond further as required. There has been much engagement between then and

now, and then and the Easter period with representative groups, including a lengthy meeting with the Minister for agriculture and I had with both the Irish Farmers Association, IFA, and Farm Contractors Ireland, and the significant engagement the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, and the Minister of State, Deputy Canney and others had with the haulage sector.

Sunday's announcement builds on the March measures to provide a comprehensive and far reaching package of support. It is objectively a comprehensive and significant package of support well in excess of what many other European countries have done per head of population. In March, as colleagues know, we legislated for excise rate reductions of 15 cent per litre for petrol, 20 cent per litre for auto diesel, and 3 cent per litre for MGO. In addition, the NORA levy was reduced by 2 cent per litre for liquid fuels such as auto diesel, petrol, MGO and kerosene. Further to this diesel rebate scheme, the maximum repayment for road haulage and bus passenger operators was also increased to a maximum of 12 cent per litre.

Today's financial resolutions provide for a second layer of intervention that I will now outline. We will reduce excise on auto diesel by a further 10 cent, VAT inclusive. Taking the 2 cent NORA levy reduction into account, this brings the total reduction on diesel to 32 cent per litre, VAT inclusive. We are also reducing the excise on petrol by a further 10 cent. Inclusive of the 2 cent NORA levy reduction, this brings the total reduction on petrol to 27 cent per litre, VAT inclusive. We will also reduce the excise on MGO, or green diesel, by a further 2.4 cent, VAT inclusive. Talking the 2 cent NORA levy reduction into account this brings the total reduction on MGO, or green diesel, to 7.4 cent per litre. As I said, this needs to be read alongside the specific sectoral package of supports brought in for those who use and are dependent on green diesel. All of these reductions will run until 31 July.

The estimated cost of these further excise reductions and the extension of the initial reductions until 31 July 2026 is of the order of €260 million. In addition, the Government has decided to defer the planned increase in carbon tax scheduled for 1 May until 14 October. This will provide further support to consumers of green diesel, kerosene, natural gas, solid fuels and other relevant non-propellant fuels. It has always been our policy to delay carbon tax increases on home heating fuels until 1 May each year. This allows for the passage of the winter heating season with the vast majority of fuel purchased between October and April, but in light of the extraordinary energy situation we feel it is now prudent to defer that planned May increase until later in the year. The estimated cost of this deferral is in the region of €22 million. In terms of the overall carbon tax revenue allocated for expenditure in budget 2026, which was over €1.1 billion, this represents approximately 2% of the allocation.

Because I genuinely believe in the carbon tax and the benefits it provides in terms of retrofitting and the move away from fossil fuels, and I note support from genuinely significant numbers of Members of the Opposition for the benefit of that as a policy, we intend to spend the same amount this year on these measures as was profiled and we will do that by running a smaller surplus. This is the first time the Government has postponed any carbon tax increase since the introduction of the carbon tax trajectory in 2020. It is genuinely not something we do lightly. As we have consistently stated, the carbon tax is an important part of our country's climate action strategy. The decision on this temporary postponement is not taken lightly, and the carbon tax trajectory does provide incentives to industry to decarbonise. It also assists in addressing energy poverty. It supports our farmers. That is a point which is often lost in the debate. A significant amount of carbon tax goes into supporting our farmers, as the Minister,

Deputy Heydon, knows, and also helps with retrofitting our homes. Deferring the increase on a temporary basis does recognise a significant turbulence we see in energy markets which has led to extreme price increases in fuels, such as kerosene and MGO, and therefore it seems to be a prudent thing to do.

It is not possible to offset all of the recent increases, which are driven by market factors, using the tax system, and we have got to be honest about that as well. That is why we also have to look at what supports we can provide outside of the taxation system. It is why we took the decision, for example, to expand the fuel allowance scheme, which provides assistance to not far off 500,000 households, in recognition that not everything can be done through taxation. If you believe in the importance of funding the retrofitting, farming and fuel poverty schemes, you will see that carbon tax does play an important role and that, therefore, we have looked at other ways of supporting people with home heating costs by means, for example, of the extension of the fuel allowance.

In addition to the tax measures being discussed, the Government has also announced a comprehensive €100 million fuel subsidy support scheme to assist farmers, agricultural contractors and fishers facing unprecedented increases in fuel costs. Farmers and agricultural contractors will benefit from a support rate equivalent to approximately 20 cent per litre on MGO use on the basis of verified fuel consumption in 2025. This is in addition to the excise changes I have already announced. The funding will be distributed proportionately, a point that was strongly emphasised in our ongoing engagement with the representative groups of farmers and farm contractors. This targeted and practical support package does ensure those most exposed to these increases will receive meaningful assistance at the most critical time of the year. I appreciate the welcome that the IFA, the Irish national representative organisation for farmers, has given to this package. I thank it and the many other farming organisations for engaging over many hours at the weekend and prior to that and for their work.

To support the haulage and coach sectors, the Government will be establishing a new road transporters support scheme, RTSS. This will be modelled on the licensed haulage support schemes of 2022 and 2023. Similar to the schemes that were deployed following Russia's brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine, it will be deployed to assist the sectors with the higher fuel prices. The RTSS will provide direct payments to the haulage and coach operators. Payments will be graduated with smaller businesses receiving a proportionately greater level of support. That is important. For coach operators that provide Local Link and school transport services, a separate support measure relating to the contractual arrangements of those operators will be introduced.

I know there has been significant concern around the issue of school transport services. The combined cost per month of these supports to the transport sector is estimated at €40 million. I also want to thank the representatives bodies from that sector and the likes of the Irish Road Haulage Association and many others which extensively engaged over the weekend, and well in advance of the weekend too, for their constructive engagement. These further measures will also be in place for a defined period of time. As was the case in March, the Government reserves the option to adjust our approach as the circumstances globally evolve and as needs require.

These supports are timely and necessary. In responding to the shock, objectively, the Irish Government has done more than most governments but this has only been possible because of

the strength of public finances. That fiscal resilience has not happened by accident. It reflects decisions taken by this Government to rebuild fiscal buffers, focuses on strengthening the foundations of the economy and represents the really hard work and resilience of the Irish people and businesses the length and breadth of this country which we acknowledge today as well. The package announced on Sunday is a further significant response to the real pressures being felt across the country. It will directly help people impacted by the unprecedented global crisis in energy supply. We have always indicated we will keep the situation under review and act again if necessary. That remains the position of the Government but this is a significant response to real pressures being felt by Irish households and businesses. It is one of the most comprehensive support packages in the EU. I support the three resolutions.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I move amendment No. 1:

In paragraph (1)—

(a) in subparagraph (a)—

(i) by the substitution of the following for the row dated 15 April 2026:

“

15 April 2026	€381.00	€502.88	€250.00	€371.85	€371.85	€0.00	€210.45	€21.00	€167.25	€79.17	€11.48
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and

(ii) by the deletion of the rows dated 1 August 2026 to 1 May 2030,

and

(b) by the deletion of subparagraph (b).”.

When I stood at the protests right across this State with the ordinary Irish people, I pledged to them I would have their back. I told them that I would fight their corner and I am not going to let them down. That is exactly what we are doing here today. We are the only party in the Dáil tabling an amendment to the Government's proposal that would actually reduce the cost of petrol and diesel and end the carbon tax on green diesel and the same on home heating oil. That is the type of leadership and action people at the protests - ordinary people the length and breadth of this State - have told me they are demanding and need. We are not going to accept half measures. We did not accept the half measures from the Government the last time. Simon Harris stood there and he sneered at me. He said we were on our own and isolated. Well, by God, Simon, you got your answer because the people of Ireland were right behind us and they were calling you and your party out for your inaction over and over again. They forced you into the situation where you are today, a place you did not want to be but you still ignore them, insult them, look down at them, sneer and jeer at them. That is what you are doing. You spoke for ten minutes earlier on and you spoke again but not once did you recognise the hardship facing ordinary Irish people across this State-----

Deputy Simon Harris: I did.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: If you did, you would understand that your measures simply do not go far enough. How could you stand up, understanding where people are at, and decide to say you are just doing nothing on home heating oil and you are just going to leave people to paddle their own canoe in relation to that issue? Simon, I stood in the homes of these people. They invited me in. They have shown me their tanks running dry. They told me they have had to put on an extra coat at night. I have been in homes where somebody opened their wallet at the start of the week and had €50 left. I talked to a plumber who was called out to a house because the plumbing system was airlocked because they ran out of oil. He could not charge them the call-out fee because the only thing that house had was a 25-litre drum because they could not afford any more. You decide to come in here with an insult to those individuals - a complete and utter abdication of your duties in saying you are doing nothing on home heating oil. It is absolutely disgraceful. If you listened, you would understand where people are at. Talk to the farmers. I spoke to a farmer - a late night call. Somebody who was in a desperate situation.

Deputy Simon Harris: I represent farmers.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: He and his father stood in a farming shed that evening in the middle of the protests. It was lambing season. The father is well beyond pension age but cannot retire because he cannot afford it. He said he and his son cannot even draw a wage from the farm now yet there is a 4 cent cut to green diesel - private jets get a 24 cent cut under Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the Independents. It shows your priorities.

Deputy Simon Harris: You are wrong.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: You can yap all you want. Why do you not go and yap to the people? Why do you not go and talk to ordinary people?

Deputy Martin Heydon: It is 27.4 cent on a litre.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Talk to the fisherman who came to me.

Deputy Martin Heydon: You are misleading people.

(Interruptions)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: You are the ones on the Government side who preach to this side. I am asking you to practice what you preach. Likewise with you, Deputy Doherty.

Deputy Martin Heydon: It works both ways.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It works in both directions. Let Deputy Doherty finish and I will say it to him as well. He needs to behave not just now but-----

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Talk to the fishermen who will tell you that the diesel went up €10,000 in a fortnight. That boat is tied up; the crew is out of work because of inaction from your Government. We will not accept half measures and we will vote against this resolution for that purpose but also because you are asking us to lock in increases in carbon tax every year to 2030. That is what this resolution states. I say to every party that stood on the protest line and talked about carbon tax, by God do not be voting for it tonight because that is what you will vote for if you support this Government.

Deputy Ged Nash: Five months into his tenure as Minister for Finance, the Tánaiste, is bringing forward a second batch of emergency financial resolutions just four weeks on from the initial €250 million package. On balance, we in the Labour Party support the decision to reduce excise duties on petrol and diesel but the Government is quickly running out of road on further reductions when the price shock from the disruption to oil supply is yet to fully hit. We know there are dangerous and volatile times on the way; this is far from over. All in, this Government has pledged nearly €800 million mostly in tax cuts and fuel subsidies. The only social spending measure to date is four extra weeks of fuel allowance. This is indicative of the priorities. The Government has managed to provide sectoral support in the shape of a €100 million package for the agrifood sector and even more for the haulage sector but until now - the Tánaiste put some details on the record - there have been few public details announced on the enhanced transport support scheme and how it will work but at a cost of €40 million a month, on top of the previous diesel rebate scheme and excise and levy cuts on fuel that will be absorbed almost immediately by price increases.

All of this being said, it is PAYE workers across the country who are left wondering what is in this for them, when their discrete package of cost-of-living measures and supports will arrive. Where are the targeted energy credits we sought to design along with colleagues in the Social Democrats, whose party policy it also is? They are targeted energy credits for people earning under €80,000. We have been arguing for that for several years. Where is the right to remote work? It would greatly help to reduce the cost of the commute. Where is the plan to reduce grocery prices or introduce more transparency in a system dominated by international players? Where is the plan to cut the cost of public transport?

The budget last year did next to nothing for working people other than keep the show on the road for the country. A point was made earlier by somebody else in this Chamber that you have managed to develop a budget with €9 billion of additional spending but the position of working people, people on low and middle incomes, is materially deteriorating. There was a budget last year that did nothing for working people. It is not news to the Tánaiste that I am saying this; I said it that day and the evidence is there. Instead, the Government committed to spending nearly €500 million this year and over €1 billion next year on VAT cuts for construction and an economically illiterate VAT cut for a hospitality sector that is adding jobs by the day. Any savings on the newbuilds the Tánaiste says he wishes to support in terms of the construction VAT cut are now gone with the increase in construction inflation. It will make no difference to the price of meals for the public in the context of the hospitality VAT cut or the wages of low-paid workers in a sector that is addicted to low pay.

In the coming weeks, there may be a situation where the supply of fuels will be disrupted and further measures may be needed. The Government is also setting a dangerous precedent

by delaying carbon duties used to fund measures to decarbonise our economy and support those who need help the most to decarbonise with their fuel needs. Other interventions like reducing the applicable VAT rate should have been considered instead. Four weeks ago when we were debating the first round of measures in the House, I asked the Tánaiste to speak to the European Commission on the prospect of reducing the VAT rate on home heating oil, for example, from 13.5% to 9%.

In the meantime, over those four weeks, our socialist colleague in Spain, Pedro Sanchez, cut VAT on fuels from 21% to 10% and Poland cut VAT on fuels from 23% to 8%. The EU has expressed concern about these VAT cuts but the Commissioner has also advised governments to reduce excise instead. It is really a technical matter related to the VAT directives. We have seen in the past that the EU has moved to reduce VAT or have a zero VAT rate on a range of products over the years.

At a time of crisis the EU simply cannot be allowed to tie itself up in bureaucratic knots while people are struggling. For the sake of the credibility of the EU, in the middle of a crisis facing every citizen, business and household in the European Union, it needs to act fast. It needs to show pragmatism and it needs to show flexibility. This is what the idea of a social Europe should be all about.

There were other options available to the Government that should have been explored outside of reducing the carbon tax. Reducing the VAT rate on fuels on a temporary basis must be on the table if this crisis continues to escalate. On balance, we will support the reductions to excise but other options were available and would have been preferable rather than undermining the principle of carbon taxes and what they are ultimately trying to achieve.

For far too many of the people I represent there is a permanence about this cost-of-living crisis. If the Government and everyone else in the House are serious about democracy and value the democratic culture and the State that my party and others helped to found and cultivate, they will not want to see ever again the kind of scenes we saw last week on our streets. Most working people I know and represent are no political allies of the extremist elements that set about the blockades last week but they are so worried about making ends meet, and so broken and despairing at the end of the week or the month, that they, against their better judgment and instincts, gave them a hearing. This is a challenge to the Government and it is a challenge to the Opposition also.

Doing little for working people in the last budget has had political consequences. Workers saw the package on Sunday and they quickly concluded there was nothing in it for them. No tax indexation in the last budget means lower take-home pay this year than last year for anybody who might receive a pay increase of 2% to 3%. The Government turned its back on a modest statutory sick pay scheme. It has delayed the delivery of a real living wage. Any change we in the Labour Party propose on remote work or paid sick leave is shot down and dismissed simply as a cost to business. The working public sees this. Sunday's package was a sectoral carve out. Working people are getting more militant and so will the trade union movement. Stand over and promote good deals that give people back their dignity, or people who have seen what happened last week could end up taking their own legitimate grievances about their own standards of living in an altogether different direction, and nobody wants to see that. This House and the Government need to respond.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: I want to start by saying to the Tánaiste that the Government has lost a Minister of State who said clearly that the leadership of the Government was not listening. When I was talking to the Tánaiste and the Taoiseach earlier during the confidence motion and reading out the experience of the cost-of-living crisis of a nurse who had worked for years for the HSE in this country, he and the Taoiseach were having a grand old chat rather than-----

Deputy Simon Harris: That is not fair.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: Well, it is true. A couple of people have been in contact with me and I want the Tánaiste to listen when I outline their experiences. A constituent who contacted me this morning said:

Now what about the rest of the people

Pensioners like myself

Every time I go into the supermarket items are going up.

I can't afford to buy meat anymore.

Maybe you could ask Michael Martin to walk around the supermarket with me to see the price of food.

This is her experience. For the first time in her life she is not able to buy the very basics in the supermarket. She wants to know what the Government is going to do to address the cost-of-living crisis for her and for people like her.

I want to read the words of another nurse who, despite doing everything right, cannot keep her head above the water.

I work on average 60 hours a week for the last 3 years.

I haven't taken a week off in that time as I work agency shifts during my annual leave.

My commute to work is 100km each way.

I have €200 in my bank account to do me until the end of the month but will need €400 just to drive to work.

I'm contemplating sleeping in my car between shifts just to save some money.

I don't know what to do, me and my partner are very frugal.

We only buy our meat from the 75% off section and freeze it,

We don't eat out,

We've cut our food portions smaller,

We've agreed that when we run out of oil we won't be refilling it.

I look online and see my fellow nurses living it up in Australia wondering if we made the right decision to stay and work in Ireland.

These are real people who are massively struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. A full-time nurse, who has not taken holidays in three years as she uses her annual leave to do agency work, should not be in this situation regarding buying food, turning on the heating and meeting friends.

For some time now, the Social Democrats have been putting forward proposals and asking the Government to implement them. We have been asking for a €400 energy credit for the 50% of households with lower incomes. This measure would help people who are really squeezed. Even before the current crisis, there were already 320,000 households in electricity bill arrears. Disabled people were up to €1,400 worse off after the budget. I really would ask the Government to look at these and at our proposals for rolling out solar panels. Every home, farm building and small business in the country should have them. Our proposals to double the grants for these should be taken on board. Ní foláir don Rialtas éisteacht. Ní foláir don Rialtas gníomhú. The Government must listen and the Government must act.

Deputy Rory Hearne: We voted no confidence in the Government today because from our perspective, from what we see and from what our constituents tell us, people are struggling and suffering. They are being devastated by a cost-of-living crisis. What we are being told about the reality of people's lives is that they cannot cover the basics. There are people in this country right now who are choosing whether or not to turn on the heating. I was in Artane in my constituency last week, talking to people at the doors. Elderly people told me they were looking at when they turned the heat on because they did not have enough money and they could not cover it. This is the reality. There are elderly people and disabled people, and I know the Tánaiste knows this.

There are also young people who are trying to save for a deposit to buy a home. The cost of living is eroding their dreams even further. We have 320,000 people in arrears. We have families who are deciding whether they can afford to go to the GP this week. I call out the Government's failure to achieve its commitments on free GP care for children. It would be a measure that would help families. This is not all about short-term measures. There are fundamental changes needed in how we deliver public services and their affordability in transport and in childcare. These are all eating into people's weekly wages and their income.

We have a fundamental problem in this country. Our cost of living is 34% higher than the EU average. There are many reasons for this and one of them, which the Government has acknowledged, is the price gouging and profit gouging that is going on. I call it cute hoor capitalism in Ireland. It goes on and we know it. People try to get as much as they can and they try to make as much as they can, and people feel it. They ask why prices are increasing so much. We need action from the Government to stabilise prices, and when people are price gouging, they should be fined properly. This is not happening enough because there is a gap between the amount by which wholesale gas, wholesale electricity and wholesale food costs are going up and what people are actually being forced to pay. The gas prices people are being charged have increased 100% since 2021.

What we also need to talk about, and what was not mentioned enough at all last week, is inequality - the gap in respect of those children who are in poverty in this country. We have one in five children living in poverty. In some form, they are affected by poverty. We have, shamefully, almost 5,500 children living in homelessness. They are in a form of poverty.

People cannot afford the rent. They cannot afford the house prices. The cost-of-living crisis is hitting them as well. We have an economy that is deeply unequal. I spoke before about how, in a way, we have two Irelands. We actually have many Irelands but there is a deep division between those who can afford this high-cost economy and those who cannot and who are really struggling. This Government is not doing enough for them and needs to structurally change our economy so people can afford to live in this country.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Minister of State, Deputy Dooley, was on the radio this morning and he was explaining why the Government has introduced this new package. He claimed, of course, that it has nothing to do with the protests or blockades; nobody believes that. Instead, he said it is because the measures that we introduced a number of weeks ago were wiped out by the international price of oil going up. How could he have known that this would happen? How could the Government have known? We warned the Government. We warned it in that debate that unless it introduced price controls, precisely that would happen. What will happen with the meagre 10 cent and nothing that has been given in terms of kerosene? What will happen to that? Quite likely, that will also be wiped out by an increase in the international price of oil. What is the alternative? The alternative is to have price controls to give people security and to stop profiteering and to let people know this is going to be the price. That is what we need to do. The Government has the power to do it. We have a Bill that we introduced two years ago to do it. People were on the streets over the past week demanding it. That has to be matched with universal measures like a €500 energy credit and measures to stop our reliance on fossil fuel immediately. We need to have free public transport. The force to do that is ordinary people. What the Parliament does, the streets can undo. That is what we have seen over the past week and that is what we need to see in the coming weeks to force meaningful action on costs of living to protect people.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: In the six years I have been a TD and for much of the decade before that, there was a coalition in this House - a coalition that existed across Government and Opposition that supported the carbon tax. There was a coalition that recognised the arguments that a dedicated, predictable and increasing fund of money was necessary to fund the changes needed to transition our economy away from fossil fuels. There was a coalition, again, across Government and Opposition, that took difficult votes against populist amendments and spoke against populist motion and a coalition that recognised that sometimes, in this House, we need to genuinely look towards the long term and not just towards the next election. Today, with these financial resolutions, the Government has smashed that coalition. It has bowed to the pressure of populists. It has provided fodder for those who argue falsely that the carbon tax - a tax that only brings in 1% of our country's tax revenue - is the source of all ills. Now that the Government has demonstrated that the carbon tax is negotiable and that when pressure is applied, it will bend, how can we expect to see the next increase take place in October? The people who blocked public transport and who prevented workers from moving are watching. They know that the Government cracked in April and it will crack again in October. A Rubicon has been crossed today and the Government has lost the argument for us all.

Deputy Brian Stanley: While the measures that were introduced will bring some relief, they do not go far enough. There are too many left out, including families, commuters, taxi drivers, home help staff, public health nurses and people who depend on home heating oil. The majority

of rural houses in County Laois depend on home heating oil. They are facing double whammies and triple whammies. Workers and families on a medium income who do not get fuel allowance have been left out. The price of diesel has gone up by 70 cent. Five EU states are calling for a windfall tax to be put on the wholesale price and for that tax to be used, namely, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Austria. Where is Ireland? Ireland needs to join that. Five large EU countries are calling for it. The Irish Government should join that and use that money to bring in reliefs for people. The backers of it say that it would make it possible to finance temporary reliefs for consumers and curb inflation and send a clear message to the profit-making companies that is what needs to happen. Ireland should back that. Greece brought in its own measure. It brought in a three-month limit on the profit margins, not on the cap. I understand the argument around the cap. It put a limit in terms of the profit margin people can have. It is 12 cent for retailers and 12 cent for wholesalers. The Government here should do the same thing.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I have a feeling that this is a very important week and a turning point in the life of this Government. Militant protests and blockades have taken place in the context of an ever-worsening cost-of-living crisis. People were threatened with repression. They got some repression as well, actually. Yet, a high level of the population supported those protests. Why does the Tánaiste think that is? Also, in opinion polls, people blamed the Government and they blamed Donald Trump and Netanyahu. By the way, the Tánaiste has never once condemned the illegal war on Iran and Lebanon that has fuelled this. I have not heard it. Verbal gymnastics have come from the Government to avoid apportioning blame. I believe that the resolutions the Tánaiste is proposing tonight will not cut any mustard. None of the issues is resolved even for the sector that protested never mind for the general population. The likelihood is that the cost-of-living crisis is going to get worse. We have psychopaths are running the population. We need workers and trade unions to step into the picture here.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The protesters who were on the streets were there, by their own explanation, because their backs were up to the wall to the extent that they simply could not sustain the fuel price hikes they were enduring. That is on top of a cost-of-living crisis that is absolutely crushing people in terms of the cost of accommodation, energy price hikes, the cost of childcare and so on. It should be obvious to the Tánaiste that the Government has utterly failed to address that crisis. The demands that were made by those who were on the streets, which the Government is refusing to bow to, were for price controls. That is what they asked for. In fact, price controls they asked for on petrol, diesel, home heating oil and green diesel were almost exactly what we put in a Bill we brought into this House two years ago and that we brought in again a number of weeks ago almost word for word. They would actually bring down the cost of fuel, green diesel and home heating oil to levels that are affordable and where there would be certainty because all of the measly concessions the Government has given, which are totally inadequate, can be wiped out virtually overnight. Price controls are what is needed. I do not know why the Tánaiste set his face against it because when it comes to handouts, as we saw in the budget, they were given to big business on research and development tax credits or, for example, €1 billion last year in excise cuts to the aviation industry to a few very profitable airlines. How can it give it to the big corporate sector but it will not give it to ordinary people who are being crushed with the cost-of-living crisis?

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Government has created some omnishambles this week. It is incredible that within the space of a week, the Government has done both the country and itself enormous damage. In many years' time, when perspective returns to this, the Tánaiste will definitely rue the decisions the Government makes today. In future, the only advice I can give him is to always talk to people in relation to any of these difficulties. The problem stemmed from the inability of elected representatives to talk to people. One issue here that people are not discussing at all it is that high energy prices are bad for the economy. I do not think I have ever really heard any political party in this country make that statement baldly in the past number of years. They make the costs of production go up. They make their exports go up. They make it more difficult to trade internationally. They put pressure on jobs. They make the food on the shelves more expensive to pay for. They are the biggest addition to the rip-off Ireland in which so many people are living.

6 o'clock

In the high energy cost country we are living in at the moment is the issue of carbon tax. It is problematic because it increases tax two, three, four or five years ahead of time, irrespective of the economic situation that people, families and businesses are in. You can only tailor a tax on the basis of where the economy is at and where people's pockets are at. This particular tax ignores all of that and that is why it is so problematic. We were the only political party in Leinster House that voted against the introduction of the carbon tax in the first place. It is at the moment hurting families, teachers, older people and all the different elements of society that keep our society going. It is hurting them horrendously.

There has been a postponement. The Government stated that such a postponement could never happen but it has. We now need a proper discussion about carbon taxes. Other European countries have carbon floors and other issues to ensure they nudge people towards non-fossil fuels in the future. This tax is a hammer in relation to people's behaviour. Carbon tax is, we are told, planned to achieve a price to move people away from carbon use. However, if the market has already achieved that price, carbon tax is just punitive. Carbon tax is, we are told, intended to change behaviours but people have no alternatives. They cannot take in the silage with an electric car. They cannot spread slurry with an electric car. The Government needs to ensure that people with no alternatives have a break that allows them to function.

Deputy Michael Collins: It looks like my colleagues are not here so I will take their time until they arrive, if that is okay with the Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

I and others were looking at the financial resolutions. In respect of the carbon tax, it looks to me as if it will be ring-fenced over a certain period, going forward. It has now been put off. I have serious reservations. I would find it very difficult to vote for anything that would have that effect, if I can prove it. I am looking into it and if that is the case, I will not be supporting this resolution. The Government may say "Yes" tomorrow. Look at all the things it refuses, as such. There are other areas that have been forgotten about. People cannot fill their home-heating oil tanks this evening. The Government might say they can go to their local social welfare offices but many people fall between the cracks. They are telling me they are cold at home and are finding it very difficult. They do not have the funding to do that. Plant hire people are not going to get any relief from the recently announced package. The road builders and those in the building sector are saying to me that they have not got it. I have a letter here

from the Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers' Organisation, ICSA, representatives of which the Government shamefully locked outside the door the other day. They attended the same protest as I did in Dublin the other day and on that basis, they got booted out. That is not a way to do business. Our way of doing business is to try to talk to people.

The Minister of State, Deputy Butler, who I wish was still here but she is no longer, was wrong when she said that I blocked people. I went to Whitegate and never blocked anybody. I spoke to people and asked them to step down. I said that if there was a reasonable package, we should step down and work together. I went to Dublin and said the same thing. It was unfair to say that I blocked something but we all say things in the heat of the moment, and I accept that.

In the past week, there was a lot of what they call "gaslighting", or whatever, and enflaming the situation. The Taoiseach made a serious mistake - he will not agree with me, as is his entitlement - instead of talking to people. Even if he could not talk to people, he could have easily found someone who would and got around this. There were ways around this. I found that on the first day of the protests in Dublin, the protestors were willing to talk but not on the third or fourth day. People got deeply entrenched and there was no point in trying to negotiate in a very difficult situation. The Minister of State, Deputy Canney, did not help the situation by telling people to use bikes instead of cars. That is fine. He is thinking of a city environment. I would love to think that I could tell people to go to work on a bike in the morning but I cannot tell people to cycle 13 km to work in the morning. Some people where I live are driving 80 km or 90 km per day back and forth to work. They are finding it difficult. The Government is saying to us that the carers of our country are being blocked from going to work. They cannot afford to go to work and that is the bottom line.

The Government cannot resolve everything. I said that at each protest. This is a war that is outside the Government's control. The Government said it had given the most. The bottom line is that it has already taken the most.

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

Deputy Michael Collins: I will conclude on that, which is the point the Government needs to remember.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I will be supporting these resolutions. It is constructive to do so. I said in a contribution a few weeks ago that the Government was not acting fast enough, which was fair comment. It has responded this time, although some will say it has not responded sufficiently, and that is also fair comment. The Government might disagree.

I agree with the Government about the overall picture. There is only a set amount of revenue. The pharmaceutical industry and IT windfall is not going to last forever so the Government needs a broad tax base, despite what is said by some of the self-appointed leaders. Some of the misogynistic, criminally convicted, rape-endorsing, tax-defaulting so-called appointed leaders are jumping on the backs of the ordinary people who have real concerns. They seem to think you can suddenly scrap the excise duty and the carbon tax, and everything is going to be hunky-dory and you are still going to have money to spend for vulnerable people where it is needed. I have been critical of the Government for the apartments tax break that

could have gone to help people with disabilities and make their cost of living more manageable but it is within the confines of trying to be fiscally responsible. People are being hit by an international conflict caused by Trump and Netanyahu. It is not of the Government's creation. It is also restricted by certain EU regulations. However, I still think that in the short term, over the next six months, the Government must respond quicker and put in the measures that will bring prices back to the level they were. This issue may last for six or 12 months and the Government must be seen to respond. It won the confidence vote but still has a responsibility because people out there are hurting.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am glad of the opportunity. It has been an awful time for the people of Ireland and it is not getting much better. Indeed, it has been an awful time for elected politicians, their families and workers. We were pegged around the place by friends and people of whom we thought a lot and people who thought a lot of us. We have been working for them for many years. I think it was what happened here on 24 March that kicked it off. There was a reduction of only 3 cent to help people with the cost of green diesel, which had gone up by 80 cent. There was only a reduction of 2 cent on kerosene, which had gone up by 80 cent, too. To throw petrol on the fire, some time around April Fool's Day, the Minister, Deputy McEntee, went to Ukraine and gave it €40 million. People started to go mad and they are mad. They are hard-living and hard-working people, including nurses and carers. It was a cross-section of the community. It was coming from every angle. That is the God's gospel truth. People are still very hurt. What I said that day was that however much more oil was costing, I knew it would have to be paid but the Government would have to forgo the extra taxes at the pump where people were paying for it. I said the Government should reduce it and not make work for itself with applications. The people were going to be in trouble filling out application forms, as they are with every other application. Many people are denied after going to the trouble of applying and the Government is giving them false hope. I said to the Government to give that money back at the pumps.

People complain about all the money that is wasted. They are right to do so. A lot of money is being wasted. We went down for €1.9 billion of a loan for the Ukrainians to keep the war going. That was on top of the €125 million that was given to President Zelenskyy. People say to me that RTÉ, when it was in trouble, got €725 million from the Government.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy's time has expired.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: The Government's response to all the people of Ireland who are in trouble is to provide €755 million.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Healy-Rae, your time is-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: RTÉ is only one organisation or one company. It is not fair what is happening, or what has happened, to our people.

Deputy Barry Ward: I welcome these measures and recognise that they are not enough to cushion everybody in this country from the effects of the greatest global energy crisis we have

ever seen. It is unrealistic to tell people that the Government is in a position to do that. Let us be honest with people.

Deputy Collins and I were on the radio this morning talking about this and he said he did not block anyone. I am not saying he did, but he supported people who did. Let us be honest about it, because those blockades stopped people getting to work and hospital, and carers getting to elderly people. I do not really want to get involved in recriminations and playing the blame game. What is much more important is that we look at it through a lens of realism. Something has just been said about the Minister, Deputy McEntee, going to Ukraine and giving a certain amount of money. I have heard this from constituents as well. One person asked me in Dún Laoghaire yesterday why we are giving money to Ukraine and what Ukraine has ever done for us. That is to fundamentally misunderstand what it is to be part of a global community. If the shoe were on the other foot and we were in a bad place, it might not be Ukraine helping us, but there would be other countries, particularly in the European Union-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Did they help us when we were in trouble starving in the Famine?

Deputy Barry Ward: -----we would be calling on.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Healy-Rae, you have had your say.

Deputy Barry Ward: They have helped us in the past. We have relied on them in the past.

Deputy Ged Nash: Brexit.

Deputy Barry Ward: When the economic crash came, we relied on the international community to keep us afloat and ensure Irish workers could put the country back where it was. Let us be honest about this. Being part of an international community is not only about taking and taking.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: See after our own people first, please.

Deputy Barry Ward: It is give and take. I am very proud of the work we have done as a country to help to provide for Ukraine. I have been there and seen what they have come through. The same argument could be made about Irish Aid and the work we do in much more under-developed countries, where children are starving. Is the Deputy saying we should take away their money as well?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Thank you.

Deputy Barry Ward: Why does he not go over and join Donald Trump's USAID cuts as well?

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am saying enough is enough. We are not in the war with Russia.

Deputy Barry Ward: Let us be realistic and honest and get on with the fact that these are resolutions that will do the people of Ireland good and that is why we should support them.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne: This is a global energy crisis we are facing and we need to see it in those terms. Showing solidarity to those who are victims of war right now is a good thing. While I support these measures, the challenge has been that many of those who are out on the protest - and I know a lot of them - are hard-working and decent people and this was seen in many ways as being the last straw.

I genuinely feel that in the last budget we did not do enough for workers. We did not index link the tax bands, though that is something we should always do. We should always make work pay. It is of concern to me when I hear employers talking about the fact that people are reluctant to work more than 19 hours because they will lose certain benefits. The challenge we saw is because a lot of workers, particularly in my constituency, commute. The Tánaiste will know many of them. An estimated 6,500 people commute from my constituency to work and college every day. Not alone did they not see sufficient benefits - there were some in the budget, but they were not sufficient - but once fuel prices increased, it became a significant problem for them.

What we have to do in the context of the coming budget, and in prioritising resources, is to look after those who work hard and contribute to the community as well as to protect the vulnerable with our disability strategy and looking after older people. It also requires, from an energy security point of view as well as an environmental one, that we move much more quickly on our investment in renewables. It is absolutely essential for wind and solar energy and indeed that we see the clearing house. That is happening at Government level, but it has to be a top priority that we start to see offshore wind being developed to a far greater extent.

This is one of the concerns. People are not afraid of contributing to the State if they can see their money is being spent well, but I worry that we are seeing a situation where public expenditure is getting out of control in many cases and people are not seeing sufficient return on their investment. We are fortunate the economy is so strong that we are able to deliver this package, which cannot be done anywhere else in Europe, but we may not always have that luxury.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy. I call the Minister, Deputy Heydon.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Martin Heydon): In responding to the debate, I thank Deputies for raising the points they did. I will go through some of them. Deputy Doherty started off with a fascination with ordinary people. I am not sure who the extraordinary people are who he is not talking about. There are only ordinary people. They are all ordinary people. Somehow he has a monopoly on understanding what ordinary people have to go through and do not. He talked about standing in the farmers' kitchen and understanding how much pressure they were under and about the fishers and how much pressure they were under. One thing struck me. In his discussions with them, did he point out

to the farmer the €100 million package that is being delivered this week or the 7.4 cent cut on excise this week that Sinn Féin seems opposed to that is there to help? Did he explain to the fisher about the €5 million per month of support there will be from March to July as part of the package that has been agreed and that there is no mineral oil tax on fuel for fishers because the State heavily subsidises mineral oil because we value what fishers do? No, he did not, because what he prefers to do as an Opposition spokesperson, as Sinn Féin wants, is to keep everyone whipped up, keep telling them there is a bogeyman over there and someone to blame.

It is great to see Deputy Doherty back in the House. I was just highlighting how he misled the Dáil when he said a 4 cent cut will not wash for farmers when the cut on green diesel for farmers is 27.4 cent, comprising the 7.4 cent we are agreeing in these motions and the subsidy of 20 cent per litre on green diesel there will be in the coming months. The Government has the back of farmers, fishers and foresters and we will support them.

Deputy Nash raised that there is nothing here for the ordinary worker and Deputy Cian O'Callaghan talked about individual workers he deals with and the constituents who have come to him and the real impact on people's lives. One of the workers he referenced could not afford meat.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: She is a pensioner.

Deputy Martin Heydon: It was a pensioner who could not afford meat as part of her diet. The Deputy specifically mentioned food on a number of occasions. If we do not intervene with the support of our €100 million package for the agrifood sector, it will have a direct impact on the cost of inflation. Energy is the biggest driver of inflation. Food inflation will absolutely have an impact on workers, so telling workers that these measures will not help them is not true. The measures supporting farmers and our package to support hauliers with a €140 million intervention to reduce the cost of logistics services that bring the food from farm to fork directly benefit everyone.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: I did not say it would not help anyone.

Deputy Martin Heydon: I am making the point. I am not attacking. I am making the point that the interventions the Government has brought in, and the packages beyond the excise measures we are voting on here, will directly support all people in their lives and will help to avoid the cost-of-living crisis that impacts on everyone. Things do not happen in isolation.

Deputy Hearne talked about people not being able to cover the basics. It is the same point with where people are struck there.

Deputy Tóibín talked about the inability to talk to people and to listen. I have been engaging with the farmer representative bodies, the fishers and others for weeks on developing schemes. There are constraints and this is the challenge for the Government. We have to explain the constraints around the energy directive, how it needs to work around state aid rules with the EU and how that takes time. We were not in a position to do more on green diesel in the first intervention, but it has taken me time here to explain that, as it would in an interview. I cannot make a short, snappy TikTok video, which I suspect was the intention of Deputy Doherty when

he was here earlier putting on the record that the intervention on green diesel was only 4 cent, wherever he got that figure from.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: The excise duty is 4 cent.

Deputy Martin Heydon: He might correct the record.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: It is in your table.

Deputy Martin Heydon: Deputy Collins talked about frustration. Yesterday on "Morning Ireland" he spoke to farmers at a volatile time. I absolutely accept how angry people have been and how many people have felt the challenge of the energy shock. After a volatile week when our country has been in a bad place, we all have responsibility. Everyone in this House has a mandate and was elected to help people. That is what we are here for. I do not question the mandate at all, but I do question why someone, after such a volatile weekend when a serious package had been agreed by the Cabinet on the Sunday evening, which Deputy Collins was well aware of, would go on "Morning Ireland" on Monday morning and try to tell people it is only 2.4 cent per litre on green diesel and try to keep the protest going and to make people who are upset and hurting more upset and hurting. That does not say compassion to me.

No one in this House has a monopoly on compassion. The Opposition talks about ordinary people as though we do not. It is clear what they are doing. The use of language matters, as a colleague said earlier.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Do not be a numpty all your life. It is in your table

Deputy Martin Heydon: From that perspective, these interventions matter and that is why we oppose the amendment put forward by Sinn Féin.

An Ceann Comhairle: As we are about to reach the 60 minutes, I will put the question on amendment No. 1 to Financial Resolution No. 1.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 52; Níl, 114; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Bennett, Cathy.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Aird, William.	
Brady, John.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Buckley, Pat.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Boland, Grace.	
Carthy, Matt.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Brennan, Brian.	
Collins, Michael.	Brennan, Shay.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Brophy, Colm.	

Coppinger, Ruth.	Browne, James.	
Cronin, Réada.	Burke, Colm.	
Crowe, Seán.	Burke, Peter.	
Daly, Pa.	Butler, Mary.	
Devine, Máire.	Butterly, Paula.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Cahill, Michael.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Cairns, Holly.	
Gould, Thomas.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Graves, Ann.	Calleary, Dara.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Canney, Seán.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Healy, Seamus.	Chambers, Jack.	
Kenny, Martin.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Clendennen, John.	
Lawless, Paul.	Collins, Niall.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Connolly, John.	
McDonald, Mary Lou.	Cooney, Joe.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Crowe, Cathal.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Cummins, John.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Currie, Emer.	
Murphy, Paul.	Daly, Martin.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Dillon, Alan.	
O'Donoghue, Richard.	Dolan, Albert.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
O'Hara, Louis.	Feighan, Frankie.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	Fleming, Sean.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	Foley, Norma.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	Gannon, Gary.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Geoghegan, James.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Grealish, Noel.	
Stanley, Brian.	Harkin, Marian.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	Harris, Simon.	
Ward, Charles.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Ward, Mark.	Hearne, Rory.	
	Heneghan, Barry.	
	Heydon, Martin.	
	Higgins, Emer.	
	Kelly, Alan.	
	Kenny, Eoghan.	

	Keogh, Keira.	
	Lahart, John.	
	Lawless, James.	
	Lawlor, George.	
	Lowry, Michael.	
	Martin, Micheál.	
	Maxwell, David.	
	McAuliffe, Paul.	
	McCarthy, Noel.	
	McConalogue, Charlie.	
	McCormack, Tony.	
	McEntee, Helen.	
	McGrath, Séamus.	
	McGreehan, Erin.	
	McGuinness, John.	
	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
	Moynihan, Michael.	
	Moynihan, Shane.	
	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
	Murphy, Michael.	
	Nash, Ged.	
	Naughton, Hildegard.	
	Neville, Joe.	
	O'Brien, Darragh.	
	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
	O'Connell, Maeve.	
	O'Connor, James.	
	O'Dea, Willie.	
	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
	O'Donovan, Patrick.	
	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghail, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Quaide, Liam.	
	Rice, Pádraig.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Sheehan, Conor.	
	Sherlock, Marie.	

	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smith, Duncan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Wall, Mark.	
	Ward, Barry.	
	Whitmore, Jennifer.	

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

Amendment declared lost.

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

The Dáil divided: Tá, 113; Níl, 54; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Aird, William.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Brady, John.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Buckley, Pat.	
Boland, Grace.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Carthy, Matt.	
Brennan, Brian.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Brennan, Shay.	Collins, Michael.	
Brophy, Colm.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Browne, James.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Burke, Colm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Burke, Peter.	Crowe, Seán.	
Butler, Mary.	Cullinane, David.	
Butterly, Paula.	Daly, Pa.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Devine, Máire.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cahill, Michael.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Cairns, Holly.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Calleary, Dara.	Gould, Thomas.	
Canney, Seán.	Graves, Ann.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Healy-Rae, Michael.	
Chambers, Jack.	Healy, Seamus.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Kenny, Martin.	
Clendennen, John.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Collins, Niall.	Lawless, Paul.	
Connolly, John.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Cooney, Joe.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	

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

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

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

Question declared carried.

Financial Resolution No. 2: Natural Gas Carbon Tax

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

(1) THAT for the purposes of the tax charged by virtue of section 67 of the Finance Act 2010 (No. 5 of 2010), that section be amended, with effect as on and from 15 April 2026, by the

substitution of the following for the Table to subsection (1) of that section (as amended by section 28(a) of the Finance Act 2020 (No. 26 of 2020)):

"TABLE

RATE OF NATURAL GAS CARBON TAX

With effect as on and from (1)	Rate of tax per megawatt hour at gross calorific value
1 May 2021	€6.06
1 May 2022	€7.41
1 May 2023	€8.77
1 May 2024	€10.13
1 May 2025	€11.48
14 October 2026	€12.84
1 May 2027	€14.20
1 May 2028	€15.56
1 May 2029	€16.91
1 May 2030	€18.09

(2)

".

(2) IT is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution shall have

statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1927 (No. 7 of 1927).

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I move amendment No. 1:

In paragraph (1), to delete the table proposed to be inserted by subparagraph (a) and substitute the following:

"TABLE

RATE OF NATURAL GAS CARBON TAX

With effect as on and from (1)	Rate of tax per megawatt hour at gross calorific value (2)
1 May 2021	€6.06
1 May 2022	€7.41
1 May 2023	€8.77
1 May 2024	€10.13
1 May 2025	€11.48

".

Question put: "That amendment No. 1 set down to the motion for Financial Resolution No. 2 is hereby negatived and the motion for Financial Resolution No. 2 is hereby agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 115; Níl, 52; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Aird, William.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Brady, John.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Buckley, Pat.	
Boland, Grace.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Carthy, Matt.	
Brennan, Brian.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Brennan, Shay.	Collins, Michael.	
Brophy, Colm.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Browne, James.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Burke, Colm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Burke, Peter.	Crowe, Seán.	
Butler, Mary.	Cullinane, David.	
Butterly, Paula.	Daly, Pa.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Devine, Máire.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cahill, Michael.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Cairns, Holly.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Calleary, Dara.	Gould, Thomas.	
Canney, Seán.	Graves, Ann.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Healy, Seamus.	
Chambers, Jack.	Kenny, Martin.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Clendennen, John.	Lawless, Paul.	
Collins, Niall.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Connolly, John.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Cooney, Joe.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Cummins, John.	Murphy, Paul.	
Currie, Emer.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Daly, Martin.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Nolan, Carol.	
Dillon, Alan.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
Dolan, Albert.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
Feighan, Frankie.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Fleming, Sean.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Foley, Norma.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Gannon, Gary.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Geoghegan, James.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	

Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Grealish, Noel.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Harkin, Marian.	Stanley, Brian.	
Harris, Simon.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Ward, Charles.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	Ward, Mark.	
Hearne, Rory.		
Heneghan, Barry.		
Heydon, Martin.		
Higgins, Emer.		
Kelly, Alan.		
Kenny, Eoghan.		
Keogh, Keira.		
Lahart, John.		
Lawless, James.		
Lawlor, George.		
Lowry, Michael.		
Martin, Micheál.		
Maxwell, David.		
McAuliffe, Paul.		
McCarthy, Noel.		
McConalogue, Charlie.		
McCormack, Tony.		
McEntee, Helen.		
McGrath, Mattie.		
McGrath, Séamus.		
McGreehan, Erin.		
McGuinness, John.		
Moran, Kevin Boxer.		
Moynihan, Aindrias.		
Moynihan, Michael.		
Moynihan, Shane.		
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.		
Murphy, Michael.		
Nash, Ged.		
Naughton, Hildegard.		
Neville, Joe.		
O'Brien, Darragh.		
O'Callaghan, Cian.		
O'Callaghan, Jim.		
O'Connell, Maeve.		
O'Connor, James.		
O'Dea, Willie.		
O'Donnell, Kieran.		
O'Donoghue, Robert.		
O'Donovan, Patrick.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		

O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Quaide, Liam.		
Rice, Pádraig.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Sheehan, Conor.		
Sherlock, Marie.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smith, Duncan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Wall, Mark.		
Ward, Barry.		
Whitmore, Jennifer.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Paul Murphy and Richard Boyd Barrett.

Question declared carried.

Financial Resolution No. 3: Solid Fuel Carbon Tax

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

(1) THAT for the purposes of the tax charged by virtue of section 78 of the Finance Act 2010 (No. 5 of 2010), that Act be amended, with effect as on and from 15 April 2026, by the substitution of the following for Schedule 1 to that Act (as amended by section 29(b) of the Finance Act 2020 (No. 26 of 2020)):

"SCHEDULE 1

RATES OF SOLID FUEL CARBON TAX

With effect as and from (1)		Description of Solid Fuel Rate of Tax per tonne		
	Coal	Peat Briquettes	Milled Peat	Other Peat
1 May 2021	€88.23	€61.42	€30.44	€45.65
1 May 2022	€107.98	€75.17	€37.25	€55.87
1 May 2023	€127.74	€88.93	€44.07	€66.10
1 May 2024	€147.49	€102.68	€50.88	€76.32
1 May 2025	€167.24	€116.43	€57.70	€86.54

14 October 2026	€187.00	€130.18	€64.52	€96.76
1 May 2027	€206.75	€143.94	€71.33	€106.98
1 May 2028	€226.51	€157.69	€78.15	€117.21
1 May 2029	€246.26	€171.44	€84.96	€127.43
1 May 2030	€263.38	€183.36	€90.87	€136.29

".

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

Question put and declared carried.

Message from Select Committee

An Ceann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration has completed its consideration of the International Co-operation (Omagh Bombing Inquiry) Bill 2026 and has made no amendments thereto.

Fuel Prices: Motion

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I move that:

That Dáil Éireann:

recognises that:

- unsustainably high energy and fuel prices in this state further compounded a pre-existing cost of living crisis;
- the duty of the Government is to protect people from severe energy shocks to the greatest extent possible; and
- the Government has the ability to cut the cost of fuel;

notes that:

- home heating oil has hit the highest price on record going back 30 years;
- petrol and diesel are on course to exceed their highest price on record this month; and
- the price of green diesel and other fuels are at unsustainably high levels;

condemns the Government for:

- not reconvening the Dáil last week and not introducing emergency supports;
- delays and half measures that abandoned many households and left sectors of the economy badly exposed; and

— not engaging directly with the protestors that has made the situation worse; and
calls on the Government to:

— take the maximum action necessary to cut fuel prices so they are affordable for the workers, families and sectors that rely on them.

Tá daoine ar fud an Stáit seo faoi bhrú millteanach agus tá sé ag éirí níos measa. Tá costas breosla ag ardú agus tá an costas maireachtála ag goilliúint. Le scéal fada a dhéanamh gairid, níl aon spás fágtha ag oibrithe agus teaghlaigh na praghsanna seo a iompar. Tá gníomh cinntithe de dhíth orthu ón Rialtas seo ach in áit sin fuair siad moill, lag-iarracht agus freagra nár shroich an méid atá de dhíth ag daoine. The reality facing people right across this State is stark. In rural Ireland and in communities right across the country, people have no alternative to the car. There is no reliable public transport network and there is no option but to pay. Right now, that cost is crushing people. Fuel prices have surged and families are watching the cost of filling the tank as it spirals week after week. For those relying on home heating oil - and there are 750,000 of a million of them - the situation is even worse.

This is not an abstract situation. This is about people wondering how they are going to get to work. This is about parents deciding which bill does not get paid. It is about older people and carers rationing heat in their homes. All the while, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have delayed and dithered. They refused to act as costs spiralled out of control and pressure mounted. Now, after weeks of delay and public anger forced their hand, they are bringing forward a package that still falls far short of what is required. It does not match the scale of the crisis. It does not provide certainty to workers who rely on their cars every day. It does not address the reality facing households that are dependent on home heating oil. Once again, it leaves far too many people behind. We again see a familiar pattern of limited measures focused on particular sectors while ordinary workers and families are expected to carry the burden. That is the core of this failure.

Even in the context of today's announcement, the choices made will not cut it. There were real choices to be made, and we have put them forward in the amendments. The Government could have removed excise duty from home heating oil, but it did not. It could have cut the cost of diesel to bring the level to a more affordable one, but it chose not to. It could have done the same with petrol, but it decided to turn its face against that. It could have gone further to deliver real, immediate relief, but it refused. Instead, it produced a package that will not even keep pace with rising prices. No amount of spin regarding today's figures changes that reality for anyone.

Let us be honest about how we got here. I cannot for the life of me understand why the Social Democrats and the Labour Party voted against the Sinn Féin amendments to help people keep their homes warm, get from A to B, drop their kids to school and go to appointments. I was shocked to see them voting with the Government and voting against the sensible proposals we put forward.

Deputy David Cullinane: Hear, hear.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: This Government is not acting and is not listening. It was dragged to take action by public anger and by pressure, because people could not take any more. Even

now, after all that, what has been brought forward falls far short. As if that was not enough, the Government is turning its fire not just on the protesters but also on the media. We have had a Minister question RTÉ's coverage of the protests. That is, as has been said by others, a sinister intervention. It is an attempt to lean on journalists, to second-guess editorial decisions and to signal that coverage of political protest should somehow be policed. That strikes at the heart of a free media. We have been here before in this country and Sinn Féin suffered the consequence of it. The Minister seems to want to bring us back to the days of section 31, when Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael censored our political party and prevented us from being allowed to even talk on the national airwaves.

This crisis is not about media rows, however. It is about ordinary people. It is about those who have no choice but to drive to work, who are trying to heat their homes today and who are struggling with the wider cost-of-living crisis. They needed decisive action and real relief. They are not getting it from Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. When Ministers quote the figures relating to today's package, they need to understand one thing. They need to understand that for the people living through this crisis, those figures do not change their reality. They do not change the pressure in a meaningful way. They do not match either the scale of the crisis or what is needed. This is why today's amendment from Sinn Féin matters. It is because the Dáil has a choice to accept a late, limited response that leaves people behind or to demand real action and leadership that meets the scale of this crisis. The Government failed to act when people needed it. It is now refusing to act at the scale required.

Deputy David Cullinane: Last October, when we debated the multibillion euro budget brought forward by the Government, we warned that people had been put to the pin of their collars. The Government brought in a budget - and the Minister of State supported it - which gave billions of euro to corporate landlords, banks and the wealthiest in the country, but very little to most working families. They were promised tax cuts and childcare cost cuts that they never got. What they actually got were increases. College fees went up. People looked on as groceries and insurance costs rose. Rents are going up. More people are homeless, and more people are facing homelessness. We warned the Government that this was getting close to a tipping point and that people were really stretched. The Government ignored us. We told it that the anger of people, because of a multibillion euro budget that left them high and dry, was simmering, and it ignored us.

A number of weeks ago, when the Government brought forward its first package of measures, we again warned it that this was coming close to a tipping point. Deputy Pearse Doherty brought forward alternative measures that could have avoided the protests, avoided the disruption we saw, given leadership and given supports to families, and again the Government ignored us. It got to a point where people had enough. That is why I had people the length and breadth of this country contacting me to say they were proud of Ireland and proud of the people of Ireland and of the truckers, farmers, hauliers, small contractors and others who were taking to the streets because of the failure of this Government. They were looking on and they were applauding because they know that they are also being shafted by the same Government.

That is why we are back here again. When we debated this issue a number of weeks ago, the Minister of State and his Government colleagues told us that the package was enough, and that was it. The Government is back now with its tail between its legs. It has come back with

more, but, again, these are half measures. The Government comes back every time a day late and a dollar short. It leaves people behind, and people are sick and tired of it. They are sick and tired of this do-nothing Government that does not represent ordinary working people and that just leaves them high and dry over and over again.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I am conscious of how deeply disappointed many people across this country are that this do-nothing Government is still in place. These are people struggling to get by. They are people who cannot afford to heat their homes, families, people with disabilities, children pushed into poverty, people who cannot afford to put fuel in their cars, the carers, the home help and other workers and small businesses struggling to survive. I assure them that Sinn Féin has their backs and will continue to fight on their behalf. The message I want to send to them this evening is not to lose hope.

I come from a rural constituency. I know all too well that homes there are reliant on home heating oil. Once again, the Government has abandoned these people with its half measures. There are 750,000 of these households across the country. Over a month ago, Sinn Féin proposed the complete removal of carbon tax and excise duty on home heating oil.

7 o'clock

Instead, the Government reduced the National Oil Reserves Agency, NORA, levy by 2 cent per litre. That is even before we consider the hardship of people with defective concrete blocks who are watching their homes crumbling and looking at the cracks in the wall with the wind coming through them.

I went to the fuel protests in Mayo and did not see any Government TDs there. Instead, the Minister for justice threatened to send the Defence Forces against our own people. These were ordinary, decent, working people and their families - farmers, hauliers, bus drivers, contractors, people with disabilities, carers, and home help workers. They were participating in peaceful protests, having been forced into taking drastic action to save their businesses. They did not want to be there. They do not want to be on these protests. What were they supposed to do to get the attention of the Government and have their pleas heard? They are deeply disappointed about people who are supposed to be independent voices in here who continue to prop up this Government.

The groups the Government decided were worthy enough of a meeting last week are not the only people who suffered during the fuel crisis. People providing meals on wheels, community workers and the carers I spoke about covered huge geographical areas in Mayo. One of the workers told me that it felt as though community health workers had been largely overlooked and abandoned by this Government. People with disabilities were left high and dry in the last budget; they were left €1,400 worse off. Sinn Féin has been calling for a cost-of-disability payment to help the most vulnerable in society through the prolonged cost-of-living crisis. Now these people are faced with soaring fuel costs and no support from Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. These carers cannot afford the fuel to put in their cars to go and see the patients who rely so deeply on them.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: The Government survived a vote today but the Minister of State should not kid himself - public confidence has not been restored. The Government limped

through, shedding some of its own along the way. People will draw their own conclusions about the motivations behind those changes of heart.

What is clear is that the outcome of today does absolutely nothing to change the reality that workers, families and businesses across the State are facing. People have lost confidence because this Government is not listening and has not listened. It has failed to act in any meaningful way on the fuel cost crisis hitting households. The Government still has not taken necessary steps to make fuel affordable at the pumps and has done nothing on home heating oil despite it reaching the highest prices on record. This is the Government's second attempt, and once again, it has come up short. Last month, it was half measures. This month, it is just more of the same. Petrol and diesel are still on course to exceed record highs and home heating oil remains completely untouched.

Across Waterford and the rest of the State, the reality is dark. Green diesel has nearly doubled in price in a matter of weeks, rising from 97 cent a litre in February to €1.80. For farmers, fishers, hauliers and small businesses, fuel is not optional. It is a core cost of them staying in business. That was the message that I heard clearly this weekend in Dungarvan and across Waterford more widely as my colleague Deputy Cullinane and I spoke with protesters, listened to them and heard their concerns, something that the Minister of State and his colleagues in government have failed and refused to do. Much better to denigrate and demonise than to actually listen.

For workers and families, it is about the cost of getting to work and keeping the light and heat on. I have heard from disabled people, home care workers, health workers, apprentices and students who are all suffering. What do we see from the Government benches today? We see self-congratulations and back-slapping. Government TDs are telling everyone and anyone who will listen just how great the Government is and how well it is doing. They have said it so often that they probably even believe themselves, but people are not fooled. They see a Government that is arrogant, refuses to listen and is wilfully blind to the real hardship being experienced.

The solutions are clear. We set them out for the Government three weeks ago and again today. A minimum 25 cent reduction on petrol and diesel at the pumps, maximum cuts to excise on green diesel, the complete removal of excise, including the carbon tax on home heating oil, and direct support for households in the grip of this crisis.

Deputy Martin Kenny: The depth of disappointment was evident in people across the length and breadth of the country over the past week, and that developed into anger as time went on. People say the Government is out of touch, but for some reason, it seems to be choosing to be out of touch and to walk away and not listen to ordinary, decent people. People can throw up all sorts of stories that some of the protesters were this, that and the other, but the fact of the matter is the vast majority of people who went out to voice their concerns were hard-working people with their tractors or buses. They are people we all know in all of our communities and whom our communities depend upon. When you are stuck, they are the ones you turn to. These are the people who were so disappointed with Government.

This conflict started out in the Gulf when Israel and America bombed Iran and all of a sudden the price of oil went up across the world. Of course the Government cannot control that, but it can control the taxes it takes on it. It can do something to help people. People

simply could not understand and still cannot understand why it took so long for the Government to realise it had to actually sit up and listen. It took people blockading the whole country, coming out on the streets, marching around pushing babies in prams and asking the Government to please listen to them because they were suffering and needed help. The Government refused to listen. We are now in a situation where the Government comes with these measures, which are too little, too late. That is what most people feel. The Government needs to recognise that because there is a huge sense of people being frustrated and annoyed but also deeply disappointed. The vast majority of people I met on those protests were people who voted for the Government parties, not for us. Those people are absolutely gutted and cannot understand why the Government chose to turn its back on them in this way. It not only chose to turn its back on them and not listen to them, but to insult them and say it would bring the Army out and clear them out of the way. That smacks of something so high-handed that the Government really needs to have a hard look at itself, at the leadership of both parties and at the Independents supporting it.

We need to recognise that we have a distance to go, but the Government has not gone that distance and what it has done here is too little, too late.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: How much noise needs to be made before the Government snaps out of its slumber and legislates for all of the people affected by the huge fuel price increases? It has selective hearing, sight and amnesia. It has selectively chosen who is to receive the most minimal cuts to fuel costs in some sectors while the general public and those in many industries who have to be on the road daily are forgotten.

Was the Minister of State nice and warm when he woke up in his house this morning? I will tell him who were not: the people who rely on home heating oil and have to choose between heating and eating. What has the Government done for them? Nothing that makes a single iota of a difference. Private bus and coach operators that are not contracted to Bus Éireann are feeling the pressure and watch on as those with State contracts only receive cuts and rebates. Some of them are sitting in the Gallery as I speak this evening, so worried about the longevity of their livelihoods that they are still watching this debate. Home help carers and disability workers on the road from morning to night performing an essential role in every city, town, village and townland in this country have been left behind. How long before we hear of them being told to modify their travel or cut back somewhere due to the ever-rising fuel costs? Incredibly, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage issued a circular on 10 April telling the fire services not to automatically roll out with the ambulance services as per normal due to rising fuel costs. They are instructed not to conduct training unless it is essential and to only perform essential checks on their fire tenders. In all the back-slapping I listened to today from Government, it forgot to mention to the people of this country all of those people in services it had left behind, many of them crucial in their own ways and some even life-saving.

The Government's failure to act has crossed a line with the people and there is no going back. It knows that itself deep down because its backbenchers have been in hiding for the past week. I am unapologetic for not accepting second best for workers, families and all the services the Government has left behind in its clamour to cling to power. I am unapologetic in voting no confidence in the Government because I know whose side I am on, and that is that of the

people of this country. The Government may live to survive another day in this Chamber, but out there where it matters, its time is up. It has lost the confidence of the people.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Hear, hear.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: The fact is the Government did survive today, but that was not down to any conversation anybody had out there with people who were actually at the pin of their collar. It has been said by many but I am going to repeat it.

Out at the protests were people who had never been seen on a protest before and who did not want to be anywhere next or near a protest. We are talking about agricultural contractors, farmers and those involved in the bus and coach industry. As Joanna Byrne has said, some of them are here today. There is some confusion and displeasure in relation to those who have the Bus Éireann and school bus transport rebate schemes, but these people have never got anything. They will tell us about the whole period during Covid when they were not looked after in any way, shape or form.

We have had nothing but disrespect from the Government and the absolute denigration of those who, as a last resort, went out to put the pressure on. We have seen the impact of the pressure. We have had a ministerial resignation. We would like to think that we may see more of that into the future as people are held accountable by their own electorates and by the people they know because, to date, we have had a Government that has not listened to the severe pressure that people are under.

The Minister of State, Deputy Troy, is no different than me. He is a constituency operator who has had people come into his office, including carers and those working as community nurses, who long before this period arrived spoke of the serious pressure they were under and that they were not sure how they could make it through or how the necessary work they were doing was going to wash its own face, because it would not. We had 320,000 people who were not able to pay their energy bills and were in arrears.

Then we have this. As Deputy Kennedy has said - actually, I meant Deputy Kenny; it is not the first time I have got that wrong - we do not hold the Government responsible for the madness of genocidal Israel and for Donald Trump, but we do hold the Government responsible for not listening, for not taking action and for the utter ineptitude of putting fuel on the fire in relation to the protests and what was going on during the week. Reference was made to those who were discommoded, and they were, but it could have been ended by the Government much more easily. What we need to see is real action. The Government survived today but it will not survive into the future because we need to see a real Government that delivers for people. What we have seen to date is failure. It is failure to listen and failure to act in real terms.

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

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: On diesel, petrol, home heating oil-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy, you should conclude.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: -----not enough has been delivered. It is too little, too late.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the Minister of State, Deputy Troy.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Robert Troy): I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I will keep my voice at a reasonable level. I do not feel that just by shouting it makes a point any more valid.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the Sinn Féin Private Members' motion on fuel this evening. I will start off by saying that, as a Government Minister of State, I engaged with the people who were protesting. I went out and met the people on the M4 in Mullingar. I recognise that those people were decent, honourable and hard-working people who did not wish to be there. They conducted the protest in Mullingar in a very responsible manner, which facilitated the free movement of people. They engaged respectfully with the Garda to ensure that people could move freely. That, however, is not a true reflection of what happened everywhere.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: It is what we had in Dundalk.

Deputy Robert Troy: That is not a true reflection of what happened everywhere and we need to acknowledge that also.

The Deputy is right that the Government won the confidence vote in the Dáil. As I said in my contribution on the confidence motion, we would be extremely foolhardy and wrong as a Government if we did not acknowledge the anxiety, fear and frustration out there of the people we represent. Sinn Féin does not have a monopoly on representation of people. Nobody does. Each one of us has received our own democratic mandate to be here for a period of five years. We may disagree in terms of how we address certain issues but this Government is acutely aware of the current fuel crisis faced by all sectors of our society. That is why we have responded with the second sizable package in the space of a number of weeks to alleviate some of those pressures. This is not a half measure as asserted in the Sinn Féin motion. When we combine the two packages, this is the most comprehensive package of any country in the EU.

It is important to state that, as a Government, we do not have the luxury of coming forward with uncostered proposals. We have the responsibility not only to respond in the short term but also to manage the long-term economic stability of this country. If it were not for the proper and prudent management of the economy over the last number of years, we would not be in a position to make the interventions at the rate we have been able to do over the last weeks.

I note that Sinn Féin's motion is quick to state that the prices of fuels are high, but it fails to state the reason the prices of fuels are high. I wish to state unequivocally that the spikes in the price of fuels are not, as the Opposition would lead you to believe, solely and exclusively due to taxation. The price of fuel is determined by a number of factors, most of which are outside of the Government's control, including the wholesale market price, international market dynamics, international exchange rate impacts, distributional costs, and retail pricing policy. Excise duty is calculated on a volumetric basis, meaning that the cash value of the tax collected remains the same regardless of the price on the forecourt. In the context of excise reductions, this means that the State will collect significantly less excise for every litre of fuel sold. While VAT operates as an *ad valorem* tax and, therefore, VAT receipts do increase as the price of a

commodity increases, the figures that have been quoted in the Dáil and in the media by certain members of the Opposition have been disingenuous and off the mark. This was done in a calculated way to instil fear, sow division and exploit the legitimate fears and concerns of members of our community.

The Government does not seek or want high fuel prices. Higher energy prices create higher business input costs. This creates higher prices for goods and services, which impacts everybody. Previously, we had calls from Opposition benches for things like price caps. That would be an extremely expensive and untargeted measure. Price controls below the market price for any goods or services would impose costs on retailers. In some cases, this could be absorbed by a reduction in profitability, but in most cases this would result in losses for the retailer. Given the very large increases in fuel prices, imposing price controls on fuel retailers would render most unviable and they would exit the market. This would result in the State having to subsidise fossil fuel consumption directly at an enormous cost to the taxpayer. Introducing a price cap on fuel to the level some Opposition Deputies have been suggesting could cost billions of euro. That money is being spent on essential services such as health, education and housing, all things that various members of the Opposition seek further expenditure on. For those who suggest that the Government introduce a piece a price cap on fuels, I ask those very same Deputies to provide a list of the public services they suggest cutting to pay for this.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: There is €12.5 billion of a surplus.

Deputy Robert Troy: There is no magic money tree out there.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: There is a €12.5 billion surplus.

Deputy Robert Troy: We must underline and understand that what we are seeing at the moment is a large increase in the wholesale market price of oil as a result of the supply shock caused by the conflict in the Middle East. This is compounding the supply issues we faced at the beginning of the war in Ukraine.

That is what is driving the increase in fuel costs. Sinn Féin's motion on fuel prices fails to mention that fact. This is an enormous challenge, not just for Ireland, but for every country around the world facing into the energy crisis. It is the Government's job to strike an appropriate balance between keeping our economy moving and our public services funded while shielding the most vulnerable from the worst impacts of the energy shock. It is fair to say that the measures taken by the Government are to support the sectors most adversely affected and those at risk of fuel poverty. Public funds are not infinite, nor should they be spent on uncosted general measures as Sinn Féin has suggested in its motion.

I will not go through the list of supports that the Government has announced, between the initial announcement over three weeks ago and the most recent announcement voted on in the past hour. The overall cost of the Government-supported packages is in the region of €750 million. As I said already, it is *per capita* the biggest and most comprehensive intervention of any country in the euro. These supports are timely and necessary. Just as we said when we made the initial announcement, these supports will be monitored and kept under review. The

truth is that nobody on that side of the House and nobody on this side of the House can say with certainty what is going to happen with the war in the Middle East and when we will see a return to the normal production and supply of oil in a global sense. That is why we have to ensure we remain agile and responsive to the needs of the people we are honoured to represent in this House.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: Ministers spoke earlier about Government measures and responsibilities, and how they have the best interests of the people of Ireland in mind. Will the Minister of State tell me this? In the most recent budget, the Government gave a generous tax break to the highly profitable fast food giants like McDonald's and Burger King. How is that in the best interests of ordinary working people?

Deputy Robert Troy: You supported that.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: Sorry?

Deputy Robert Troy: You supported it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Do not interrupt the Deputy.

Deputy Robert Troy: You supported it.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Is this a questions and answers session?

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: The question I asked was how that was good for ordinary working people, the people we were out on the protest with. The Government's tax breaks ensured that the profits of big developers pushed the average profit of an apartment from approximately €50,000 to €80,000, yet when ordinary working people try their best to get by, go to work, raise a family and find a home and ask for a break and supports, they are given crumbs like a handful of cent off the price of green diesel and home heating oil. Average prices for a home continue to run away from the reach of ordinary people.

I am proud to have spent so much time with those on a protest in Kilkenny, ordinary people from every walk of life who are tired and just want a break from the struggles of everyday life. What I found so uplifting was the constant support coming from the public and from local businesses who wanted to stand with those on the picket line. There is the sheer volume of people who have emailed me over the past few weeks and shared their own personal stories of how the cost-of-living crisis has been suffocating their lives. However, they have been suffering before now. It has not just been because of the war. They have been suffering because of the Government. I got emails from older people and people with disabilities who wanted to be out with the protesters, but they could not because they were at home trying to stay warm, in their beds for longer than they needed to because they could not afford heating oil. It is as simple as that.

I met workers in their 20s and 30s who felt helpless. They asked me what the point was in paying taxes in this country as they would never be able to afford a house. They did not know

if they would be able to afford to have children. Parents I met are worried about the future of their own children. There were grown men who cried because their businesses were going under. The political decisions of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have only added fuel to their fire.

I stand with the ordinary people of Ireland, who have absolutely no confidence in the Government. The volume of emails I got have stated that quite clearly. Ministers say, as one did today, that some of the people on the protest were their friends. You do not treat your friends like that. I can go back to Carlow-Kilkenny and hold my head high. I know whose side I am on. The Minister of State and the Government have failed to listen to the people. They have failed time and time again to hear the people. It is shameful.

Deputy Shónagh Ní Raghallaigh: Tá an mhuinín caillte agam agus ag muintir na hÉireann as an Rialtas. Tá cosmhuintir na tíre ag streachailt agus ag fulaingt le costais mhaireachtála le fada agus níl an Rialtas tar éis dóthain a dhéanamh chun an brú a laghdú. Tá an Rialtas scoite ó shaol an ghnáthdhuine agus caithfidh sé imeacht.

My office has been inundated with messages from hundreds of people in Kildare to express their lack of confidence in this Government to handle the current crisis and deliver a decent quality of life for people. The bottom line is that working people are crippled by rising costs and have been for a long time. The Government has consistently decided to sit back and do nothing. Prices at the pumps have skyrocketed since America's illegal war on Iran began. That is on top of soaring grocery prices, electricity, housing, childcare and insurance costs. None of this was inevitable. The Government has failed to act to reduce what are the highest electricity bills in Europe, leaving more than 300,000 in arrears. The Government has failed to do anything about price gouging in big supermarkets. It has failed to cap childcare costs, as promised, in its first year. It has made it policy that renters will face thousands of euro in rent hikes in the next couple of years. Now, it has short-changed households across the State with a set of half measures on fuel costs and a small cut in excise duty that will not make a dent in making fuel affordable for Kildare commuters who are already paying more than €100 per week for petrol. It has done nothing on home heating oil, leaving carers, elderly people and people with disabilities to choose between heating or eating. A woman in Athy told me she was rationing oil and using extra blankets to keep her two-year-old grandson warm at night. This is wrong.

Incredibly, in the middle of this crisis, the Government raised school transport costs and brought back State exam fees. People are struggling and living pay cheque to pay cheque while the Government sits idly by. One man in Kildare town told me that this was affecting not just his quality of life, but his sense of security and stability. Not only are our leaders out of touch but they regard ordinary people with arrogance and disdain, as we saw on full display when the Taoiseach refused to meet with protesters to hear their concerns. Tá athrú de dhíth. This Government was only saved today because of a bunch of self-serving, spineless Independents.

Deputy Thomas Gould: The first thing I want to say is that I am really disappointed in the Labour Party and the Social Democrats tonight and how they voted. I cannot believe they voted with the Government and against Sinn Féin when we tried to bring down the price of fuel and home heating oil. We are supposed to be united together in opposition against the Government. We stood against it, and we voted that we did not have any confidence in it. We stood and did that together. At the same time, the Social Democrats and the Labour Party break

and vote with the Government tonight. It is unbelievable on a night when the Government betrayed the people of Ireland.

The people were betrayed in this Chamber tonight with the vote of confidence in this Government because no one outside Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and those Independents have confidence. Shame on them tonight. Shame on them for what they have done to the people. They have driven people to barriers and out to protest. They have united the people against this Government, against fuel taxes, against driving people into poverty and against driving people into being cold and hungry. How is it that a person can work all week long and have no money left at the end of it? The reason is that Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Independents are more interested in looking after themselves.

What happened here tonight will be remembered. People will not forget what the Government has done. If its members think this is over, I can tell them it is not. The people's voices will be heard. We saw the Healy-Raes broke ranks tonight because they heard it in Kerry. They were told in Kerry that if they voted for this, they should not come back to Kerry. I tell the Government's members that if they keep going with what they are doing, not one of them will be back here after the next election. They have betrayed the people. They have put the interests of the party ahead of the people. How can that be right? In the last budget the Government gave nearly €700 million to speculators on apartments that were already profitable when people cannot put a roof over their heads and thousands of children are in homeless accommodation. I was talking to a man on the train up today. He, his wife and child came up here to protest. He said "Tommy, we never go to protests. Where is the future for my child? Where is the future for my family?" That is what people are saying. I was down in east Cork and met people. There were fellas who could not afford to go to work because it was costing them more to work than they were making. This Government has betrayed the people. When the show "Reeling in the Years" is on in years to come this will be remembered as the night Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Lowry Independents put themselves ahead of the people of Ireland, but the people of Ireland will not rest until they are gone out of government. They should be gone. They should hang their heads in shame. They should stand up and be counted. If the Minister of State believes the Government is right, let us have an election because the Government will be run out the door.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Opposition cannot even agree what government we would have.

Deputy Thomas Gould: The Government will be run out the door.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: The events of the last week have betrayed this Government's inability to grasp the level of desperation and frustration that is out there among people who feel they cannot keep their heads above water. The impetus behind these protests and blockades had been fermenting long before last week and long before Trump and Netanyahu's illegal war on Iran, which is just the latest thing to give rise to a fuel shock and price shock. This is an issue that has been brewing for years. These protests last week became something far bigger than just a protest by farming and haulage sectors; they are about the level of desperation felt by workers and households who have for years been put to the pin of their collar by a spiralling and seemingly perpetual cost-of-living crisis that includes energy bills, rent, house prices, grocery prices, childcare costs, education costs and the cost of disability. I could go on. The

frustration being aired on O'Connell Street, on the M50, in Whitegate and in Rosslare – that cry for help – had been coming from households and small businesses long before the escalation last week. The Government was warned about this. While the Labour Party might disagree with others in the Opposition on the details, we have consistently and as a united bloc said the Government is not doing enough to support working people and vulnerable people who feel they are on the brink.

Time and again, this Government has shown whose side it is on. It has consistently put corporate interests and big businesses above the urgent needs of ordinary hard-working people. Workers and households up and down the country feel abandoned by this Government. It should have responded far sooner to the protests and blockades last week. What we saw was a Government flailing. It was a Government with no principles or values guiding its actions. It was a Government without a clue what to do. It had a leadership in the Taoiseach and Tánaiste that only spoke down to protesters without hearing or understanding the genuine grievances at the heart of the protests. It had a justice Minister playing the big man and threatening to deploy the Defence Forces, which served only to inflame tensions even further. This is not how to listen to genuinely held pleas for help. This is not how to manage a crisis.

Last week we saw critical infrastructure blocked and serious disruption caused to working people and families in Dublin and across the country. We value protest and we must protect it, and protests by their very nature must be disruptive, but it was the Government that allowed the blockades at critical infrastructure sites to develop and to fester through its inaction, its inflammatory rhetoric and its failure to get around the negotiating table with the representative bodies. Working people, small businesses, small farmers and so on are at the sharp end of the cost-of-living crisis and very much have just cause to protest. I think we all - or certainly those on this side of the House - felt a considerable degree of support for the protests among the general population. I have received countless emails from constituents in Dublin South-West expressing their solidarity with those protesting and I found it telling that very few people contacted me who were annoyed at the protests despite the disruption. Despite some very questionable people leading the protests, fair-minded people can see there is a serious issue at the heart of these protests and blockades. Again, such is the desperation of so many people and such is the perpetual struggle with the cost of living that many workers and families joined the protests and there was a hope among many that the protests, as imperfect as they were, would lead to better outcomes for everyone. However, those regular PAYE workers have been left high and dry once again by this Government. As my colleague, Deputy Nash, has said, the package of measures announced on Sunday has been designed to placate narrow sectoral interests and has abandoned PAYE workers in the process even though they are the ones who will end up footing the bill for it. There is little or nothing in this package for the low- and middle-income workers under increasing pressure from rising energy bills, skyrocketing grocery prices and escalating housing costs.

The Labour Party has advocated for time-limited supports to keep exposed sectors running, such as the small farmers and hauliers who play a vital part in our economy and are feeling the pinch. This Government has some real explaining to do to the 320,000 households in long-term arrears on their electricity bills who were looking to this package in the hope some respite would be forthcoming. Let us put this into context. Figures released to me by the CRU have shown the level of debt held in arrears on energy bills is about €185 million. The package of supports for the farming and haulage sectors announced on Sunday is worth almost three times

the cost of giving an amnesty to those who cannot afford to keep up with their energy bills and are choosing heating and eating. Again, there is no doubt supports were required for these struggling sectors that rely on fuels like diesel and petrol, and we supported the Government's Financial Resolutions because something is better than nothing and we understand the pressures facing those industries and ordinary people. However, the Government has decided once again to sideline ordinary workers and households who are barely able to keep their heads above water. These are people who have been crying out for help for years. The message that has been sent by Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Independents is they will only listen to your concerns if you close the country down, and that is an incredibly dangerous precedent to set.

I also raise the carbon tax delay. There are any number of interventions the Government could have made to reduce the cost of fuel for hauliers, farmers and everyone else. It is deeply disappointing and depressing that it is this climate-positive measure the Government has chosen to jettison over any other option to alleviate the energy price crisis we are facing. The Government could have done subsidies, direct payments or additional excise cuts. I find it ironic that, on the week the Government has finally agreed to the long-held Healy-Rae and Sinn Féin policy of undermining the carbon tax, Sinn Féin chose to bring a motion of no confidence and Michael Healy-Rae chose to resign from Government. We need clarity from the Government on the impact this delay - if it is just a delay - is going to have on the funding of our vital climate measures the carbon tax pays for and is ring-fenced for.

I refer to measures like retrofitting grants that are helping people to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and reduce their bills, measures like ACRES and other agri-environmental schemes that are helping farmers to decarbonise and therefore protect them against exposure to fossil fuel crises like the one they are experiencing at present and measures like the just transition fund and poverty supports.

The carbon tax is a crucial funding source for the very measures that will help to move us away from our dependence on fossil fuels and protect us against future energy crises. Funding from the carbon tax has already been allocated to all of the measures in budget 2026-----

Deputy Réada Cronin: Forty per cent of it was not.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: -----but was done so under the assumption that an increase would be happening next month.

Deputy Réada Cronin: Keep up, like.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: We need clarity from the Government now on whether this delay will amount to a cut in the budget for climate measures or whether the funding gap will be made up by general Exchequer funding. I am pleading with the Government to ensure this move on carbon tax does not adversely impact on our already meagre just transition funding. Anything less would be a final nail in the coffin of this Government's commitment to meaningful climate action.

If the Government decides it is going to use general taxation to make up the shortfall to fund these climate measures, funding that has already been allocated by the now abandoned carbon tax increase, then it Government needs to be honest with every taxpayer in this country that it

has given up on the polluter pays principle and everyone is now subsidising the continued use of polluting fossil fuels which have brought us to this point.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: I thank my colleague, Deputy Ahern, for allowing me to share time with him. I am extremely disappointed that those who criticised my party have not waited for a response. I did not want to speak about this tonight but if people want to stand here and criticise my party, scrapping the carbon tax would have allowed a €1 billion hole in the public finances. I am not sure what I would say to an elderly person who has made an SEAI application to retrofit their house or to get their house wrapped if I was a hypocrite and did not support the financial measures that have been implemented by the Government. Do not criticise my party and then not stay around to hear the reason we voted in support of the somewhat practical measures that were outlined. We do not support the carbon tax reduction Deputy Ahern spoke about.

The protests we have seen in recent days reflect something very real. At the centre of this anger is the rising cost of fuel. It is the cost of simply getting to work, getting children to school and keeping daily life moving. There is deep frustration among the public and, as Deputy Ahern said, it is hardworking ordinary families who are put to the pin of their collars trying to make ends meet. PAYE workers and ordinary members of the public are being squeezed and for many there is no alternative. They have to drive and they are being asked to absorb costs they simply cannot afford.

I also believe some of the language used by the Government last week was completely wrong. It did not fully grasp the depth of anger that exists. When people feel unheard, that frustration only grows. The Minister of State, Deputy Troy, said that the majority of those who were protesting were hardworking decent people and they absolutely were. However, we cannot condone some of what we saw during the protests and I do not believe it is appropriate to engage with self-appointed representatives who do not speak for the wider public.

This situation should have been de-escalated long before it reached this point. The Government did not have to put our gardaí and Defence Forces into very difficult situations. I have great sympathy for them. They are members of those communities they had to go into and they found themselves in such difficult circumstances.

We cannot ignore what is driving this. Families across this country are at breaking point. People are doing everything right and are still falling behind as the cost of fuel, groceries, energy and housing continue to rise faster than their incomes. That is where our focus must be. If we are serious about being constructive, we must bring forward real, costed solutions.

Let us be honest, some people have been good at protesting and posting online but slow to offer any credible costed proposals. That is not good enough. Costed proposals must ensure we have targeted fuel supports for workers and rural families who have no alternative but to drive. It means targeted energy supports for PAYE workers. It means intervening when prices are spiralling, including in the cost of home heating oil. It means reducing energy costs and ensuring excessive profits are used to support households.

Fuel may be the spark to these protests but this has exposed a deeper pressure on working families. People are looking for leadership, fairness and the chance to build a decent life through hard work. Our job is to listen and is to act and it is the Government's job to deliver.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: I will not stand here and shout and have a back and forth because there has been far too much shouting this week already. There has been far too much chest beating and too many instances of people not listening, not engaging and of parties becoming so entrenched that we were at real risk last week of the country collapsing. I was so worried about where those protests were going to end up.

I want to commend the work of An Garda Síochána. The work gardaí did across the country was incredible. They went in and spoke to the protesters. They had those discussions and the hard conversations and they managed to de-escalate a situation that unfortunately the Government had escalated to a huge degree during the previous days. What we needed was dialogue at that point and not dismissing people. We needed to show them a level of respect and to be prepared to listen. You do not necessarily have to agree with people. You do not have to like them. A lot of the values that were expressed by people on those protests were not values I would hold.

However, as there are so many people who feel left behind in this country, there is a real risk that there is very much a fertile ground there for bad actors to come in and manipulate that and use it for their own political means and agenda. There is a real onus on and need for the Government to provide a leadership.

I know things have changed. The structures of how we engage and how we dialogue have changed. There might be a need to look beyond the more traditional structures we have relied on to date. With the advent of social media, there is the ability to quickly put information out there and get people really wired up. It happens so quickly.

One thing really struck me last week when I was driving and came across a blockade in County Wicklow. Two artic lorries blockaded the N11 and I would say there were maybe three or four tractors. There were probably only ten people at the blockade and it was a very stark image of how quickly and easily the country can be shut down. It did not necessarily need a lot of people. We have all had these discussions today and I ask that the Government takes them on board and listens because there is a much bigger issue at stake here than just dealing with the fuel protests.

It was so interesting that people who would normally not align with or support protests of this kind were so supportive of them. I was really surprised when I was talking to people. The reason they supported these protests is that they could understand. They have felt it in their own lives. It was like these protests became an extension of what their lived experiences were and how they were struggling. The reason they were struggling may have been different and may not necessarily have been due to fuel costs but families are struggling and we have been trying to get that message across to the Government for years now. I do not think this issue has just popped up this week or last week. There has been this undercurrent of families who are finding it really difficult. We all know these families. They are in our constituencies. They are the ones who do not protest. They are the ones who do not shout. They are the ones who just take it all on board themselves but they are under huge pressure. It is those people I am worried about and who I feel are really being left behind.

When we look at the facts when it comes to the different pressures, electricity costs are just skyrocketing. Unfortunately, we will see a lot more of that happening. The initial impact of

this energy shock is on fuel, on the petrol and diesel pumps and on green diesel but in a number of months, it will move into gas prices and electricity prices.

There are 315,000 people who are in arrears at the moment and who are struggling and trying to catch up with the problems we experienced after Ukraine. They are chasing their tails, and 8% of them have been in arrears for longer than 90 days. They are going to be unable to pull themselves out of that hole. That is why the Social Democrats have for a number of months been calling for a targeted energy credit of €400 for families and households that earn less than €70,000 in order to try to give those people a bit of breathing space. We are very clear in all our policies - they need to be targeted because we do not have an endless bucket of money and we do not know how long this crisis will go on for. It could go on for years. We need to protect our resources while protecting those struggling the most. We have a motion we will be bringing forward tomorrow which contains a proposal for an energy credit. I hope the Government will give it serious consideration.

The other part of the proposal we will discuss tomorrow relates to solar. The Government tends to lurch from crisis to crisis. A crisis happens, people struggle, there is huge outcry, the Government has found money and given money out in untargeted measures such as the previous energy credits. That cost billions of euro. I think €100 million was given in credit to the electricity meters of holiday homes during the previous Dáil term. At that time, it was very much stated that this was an emergency measure and that we needed to get it out quickly, but there was no acknowledgment that we needed to change how we do things and ensure the systems, structures and infrastructure were in place to make us more resilient to these energy shocks, to make households, businesses and the country in general more resilient. That has not been done. A huge amount of money has been set aside for retrofitting. I understand why that is necessary, but it is costly. Many people are not able to afford it, and it is also very disruptive. We have seen studies that show that when people retrofit they do not necessarily cut their emissions or energy usage. It makes their homes more comfortable but does not really impact on spending on energy. I have asked the Minister previously to look at solar. You can get solar panels up on your home in a few hours. I left for work one morning at 8.30 a.m. and I got a message from my husband at 12 noon to say that we were completely off the grid; we were pulling in enough solar to run the house. It is so quick to do, relatively cheap compared with retrofitting and can be rolled out across every house. One million homes in this country are suitable for solar panels. Part of our solar for all plan is to expand the warmer homes scheme to include free solar panels for those at risk of energy poverty and double the grants for all other households. I ask the Minister to do that. The battery grant needs to be brought back in and plug-in solar needs to be looked at as well as more supports for businesses. They are simple measures but they are sustainable. They will help homes to be more resilient against future energy shocks.

Deputy Rory Hearne: This is a cost-of-living crisis that has been going on for almost five years. The lack of self-awareness on the part of the Government is really frustrating and disappointing. What we saw last week was an expression of how people are struggling. It was one section of society but so many people are struggling. At the time of the most recent budget, we in the Social Democrats put forward an alternative budget that included targeted measures but the Government ignored us. We put forward a proposal for an emergency cost-of-disability payment in March which was ignored by the Government. We put forward a proposal, and will

bring it forward again tomorrow, for a targeted energy credit of €400 per home to help those with an income of €70,000 or under. The Government has ignored it. The Minister of State might understand why it is extremely frustrating for people across the country and for us here that the Government says it is listening, doing what it can, it hears us and is making changes. I just listed a number of targeted measures that would make a real difference to people's lives. Those measures are costed and the money is available to do them. Why is the Government not doing it? A targeted energy credit and an emergency cost-of-disability payment are two things the Government could do. I have racked my brain to understand why the Government is not doing it. Surely, as a Government, it wants to get re-elected and understands it has the money. I think it is a question of political priority. As a result of the budget, there was a €1,400 cut for disabled people. They effectively received a cut in the budget. It is vulnerable people who lose out and this Government has not and does not prioritise them.

It is the same in the area of housing. I have made the point over and over and we have highlighted it. We are talking about a cost-of-living crisis. Imagine being evicted from your home. You cannot afford to get somewhere to rent so you go into emergency accommodation, which is an expense to the State. Young people are essentially having to emigrate because they cannot afford to rent, and this Government just stands by and says it is international issues, inflation hurts everyone and it can only do what is fiscally sustainable. Yet, it had no issue in giving over €1 billion in tax cuts to fast-food giants and the VAT cut to developers, investor landlords and funds in the budget - €1 billion each year will go to them yet when it comes to disabled people or children in poverty, the Government says it is not fiscally sustainable and we have to wait. This Government has its priorities all wrong. It is not listening to the people struggling in this cost-of-living crisis that has been going on for many years. We will continue to push for these measures and to push this Government until it listens and makes the changes needed.

Deputy Charles Ward: People are at breaking point. They are struggling every day just to get by. Many of these people took to the streets last week to voice their concerns and engage in their democratic right to protest. What did the Government do? It vilified and threatened them. What kind of democratic republic are we living in when, instead of listening and engaging, our Government vilifies and threatens its citizens and treats them with contempt? It is simply despicable. The people of this country deserve better. They deserve a Government that listens to them, truly values them and works for the people and not against them. The citizens are crying out for help and to act instantly, not delay.

I am getting hundreds of emails from my constituents. They are a cry for help. It is desperate and it is getting worse. We are dealing with a real issue and it is not getting any better. I will read out some of them. The first states:

The prospect of owning our own home feels completely alien to use. It feels out of touch and out of reach. We are struggling. The both of us are working. I am a healthcare worker and my husband is in construction. We cannot afford to keep heating oil in our tank. We have two kids. What can we do?

This is just the start. A third-year nurse also contacted me. She said, "I feel like I made the wrong decision to go back to nursing. I wish I went to Australia two years ago."

Another one said:

I got married last year. I have been working in a family-run business in the agricultural sector for the past 20 years. Myself and my wife both work full time to provide for our family - our two kids. Every week it is getting harder and harder. Neither of us smoke or drink. We do not go out socialising. We had to give up our pastime hobbies and we are constantly having to dip into our savings. There is no help. There is no future for us in Ireland.

This is what they are saying. This is what is going on. People have given up hope. In Donegal, heating oil is used to heat 85% of homes. Over the past month, people have had to find an extra €700 which they simply cannot get.

8 o'clock

The oil has run out. They are sitting in damp homes. They are letting their kids go to bed holding hot water bottles and wearing extra layers. They are doing so in this day and age. Shame on the Government.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: There are 320,000 people in this country who are in arrears with their energy bills because they just cannot pay them. We have about 700,000 people who are living in poverty, and we have hundreds of thousands of people - and this is what was expressed in the streets - who are absolutely crucified by a cost-of-living crisis that started before Trump's and Israel's disastrous war commenced. It was already crushing people and producing arrears, hardship and suffering. We can add to that the exorbitant rents and accommodation crisis leading young people to leave this country because they cannot afford to live here. Trump's war makes it even worse, and the Government throws crumbs to people that will make almost no difference.

Compare what the Government has given in its total package with the headline "Irish tax relief on jet fuel for airlines operating here to hit €1bn this year". That was last November. A few commercial airlines get an exemption on excise of €1 billion. Profitable companies get more by a significant margin than all the tens of thousands of people who are being hammered with the fuel and energy increases that are crucifying them. It is the Government's priorities that are the problem. Trump and Israel have made this mess worse. Some of those who cheer them on should think seriously about that because this war is costing not just lives, it is also hitting people in their pockets. The Government has failed to protect people because it prioritises corporations that are making massive profits rather than struggling working people and households in this country.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The warnings from us on the Opposition benches were ignored. In the context of the protests in Laois that I attended, there were decent hard-working people who work 60 or 70 hours a week present. Truckers told me that they are losing €6,000 per month. They can only do that for a couple of months. The fact is that they could not get a week's wages and were sinking below the waterline. While the measures proposed may bring some relief, a lot of people, including commuters, have been left out. There are 12,000 people in Laois who commute out of the county to work. Many of them do so by car out of necessity. There are taxi drivers, home helps and public health nurses. There are 700,000 people who rely on home heating oil. Many rural households in Laois rely on home heating oil; the majority outside of Portlaoise. These are low- and middle-income families who are been crucified. They do not

get the fuel allowance. They are not entitled to it. They are left out. This is on top of a cost-of-living crisis. There are 320,000 households that are in arrears with their electricity bills and 180,000 households that are in arrears on their gas bills. If we look rents in Laois, there are cases of more than €2,000 month being sought in rent. One family has childcare costs of €1,400 a month. School transport fees are up and leaving certificate fees are back and being levied. This is a very tough situation, and further measures are needed for people.

A budget was introduced last October. In the budget before that, which was just before the general election, helicopter money was dropped out of the sky on top of people, including on top of us and those who did not need it. Developers, landlords, hoteliers, McDonald's, Supermac's and Starbucks were all looked after. What happened with ordinary workers? The tax bands were frozen. What happened as a consequence? Joe and Mary Soap who are paying tax and are registered workers are paying more tax than they did last year. Not alone did they not get zero, they are in reverse. That is not good enough. What the Government did in 2024 was cynical. Last year, following the election, the Government totally turned its back on ordinary working people. That cannot continue.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: We have just seen very militant protests that were widely supported in society because of the acute nature of the cost-of-living crisis and the fact that people were supporting those who were having a go. A marker has been laid, and we need workers to do the same.

In the couple of minutes I have, I want to highlight that there were some issues with these protests. It was noted by many people that some far-right individuals and far-right talking points emerged during the protests. There are some who should not have been let near a microphone, never mind allowed to crawl out from under the rocks they were under. Christopher Duffy, for example, used the words "F- around and find out" when Renée Good, a young woman in America, was shot dead by ICE, cheered on a rape threat against Greta Thunberg, used anti-migrant hate and is an out and out misogynist. He was involved in these protests from the outset. James Geoghegan has been widely reported as spreading anti-migrant hate. He is a tax defaulter and an animal abuser. He said the Government was bussing asylum seekers to vote in the elections in 2024. He is a climate denier. A councillor in Kildare, Tom McDonnell, said women need to breed more. That is his history. He is blaming this crisis on people in IPAS centres rather than Donald Trump and Netanyahu and the imperial adventures they are engaged in.

Then there is reportedly a character, Michael McCarthy, who said that Hitler needs to be understood and that he was not all bad. He launched a GoFundMe to raise money for food and drink for the protesters. There is €150,000 in that fund, and a lot of people want to know how somebody like him was allowed to set up a GoFundMe. He has called for mass deportations. He is linked with the far-right and an organised far-right group. That GoFundMe needs to be taken down. Fascists such as Niall McConnell were interviewing some of these protesters. There is the whole issue of the far-right channels being used to promote the protests and far-right individuals controlling WhatsApp groups and pages, apparently, such as the Dublin fuel protest page. These are people who have absolutely nothing to do with rural contractors. One of them lives in Dublin 15. I know her. These people should not be allowed anywhere near a protest movement that wants popular support in society. We should call them out.

Deputy Seamus Healy: This is an arrogant Government. It has not listened and is not listening. It has not listened to representative organisations, the public, TDs or Opposition parties. Several motions for a cost-of-living package have been debated in the House. My Private Members' motion in December calling for price controls on electricity, gas, fuel and food was arrogantly voted down. The recent packages are too little and too late. White diesel now costs 36 cent more per litre than it did at the start of the illegal US and Israeli war. Green diesel is through the roof, heating oil has almost doubled and petrol is substantially higher. There is nothing in the package for PAYE workers. They have been abandoned.

The Government could and should have introduced a much bigger package. The claim that it does not have the money does not wash. In budget 2025, which was introduced October 2024, the Government found €2.2 billion to buy the general election which took place seven weeks later. It also has a €20 billion rainy day fund. It is pouring rain now, and it is time to use the fund for a proper cost-of-living package. Government decisions which continue to make this country dependent on fossil fuels mean we are very badly affected by energy shocks such as that we are currently experiencing. Trump and the US-Israeli war in Iran are directly responsible for this fuel shock. The Government's failure and refusal to stand up to Donald Trump, that far-right unhinged madman in the White House, means that he has been emboldened and now believes he can do what he likes. He has threatened to wipe out a whole civilisation.

He has engaged in a genocidal war on Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and Iran-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Healy.

Deputy Seamus Healy: -----and he has even attacked the Pope. It is time to stand up to him-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Gogarty..

Deputy Seamus Healy: -----pass the occupied territories Bill and stop-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Healy, resume your seat.

Deputy Seamus Healy: -----military planes going through Shannon.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Hear, hear.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I want to follow up on what Deputy Healy said. Our Government obviously has to maintain diplomatic relations with the Trump Administration, but we need to be a good bit stronger in highlighting this illegal war. In this Chamber in January, I asked the Government to do more in terms of the vile, oppressive theocracy in Iran and how it has stamped on its own people and executed so many. What Trump and Netanyahu have done will set cause of the freedom of the Iranian people back for a considerable period. They deserve a place in hell for that. I said in the earlier debate that those in government are not the devils in this issue, just as those in opposition are not the angels. Sometimes, we play

politics and are populist. The Great Satan, as the Iranians would say, is Trump, because Trump is the one who caused this whole mess and put us into this crisis.

We have seen fuel protests throughout Europe and elsewhere. We have to listen to our population and give them the help they need as quickly as possible. That is why the motion of no confidence arose. People were of the view that the pain they were feeling was not being responded to or not being responded to quickly enough. Maybe the Government should have gone out on some of the protests and engaged with people. I want to call out the fact, as others have said, that there were so many disorganised groupings involved. Some of them are far right. Some of them are conspiracy theorists, climate change deniers and Trump supporters. They have self-appointed leaders, including the one I mentioned earlier who said he did not care if a woman was raped. These are the nut jobs who were calling themselves the leaders of the people. We have to listen directly to the people and to respond to them and be seen to respond. Otherwise, these nut jobs will jump on any bandwagon and try to make hay while the sun shines.

Deputy Michael Collins: I listened to Deputy Gogarty with interest, and he is right. There were, unfortunately, a lot of self-appointed leaders involved in protests. However, there were very decent people involved in the protests I attended. They tried their best to weed out those, I call them thugs, who try to get involved. They get involved in everything that is going on. They think they can save the world from their homes, but that is not usually the case.

There is a lot of stuff we are going back over here today. In relation to home heating oil, there was no decrease in the home heating oil and people are suffering at present. Use of the word "heating" is becoming widespread in the context of the fact that there are 300,000 people who cannot pay their electricity bills. That is a major issue that has been constantly spoken about in here. Unfortunately, those who mentioned it were never listened to. It is a very serious issue. The Government should have moved on it.

In relation to other issues, there are very small things like cancer clinics, although they are probably not small in some respects. A discussion took place on C103FM yesterday morning in relation to the success of the cancer clinic in west Cork, but the fuel crisis is hitting it hard. This is a voluntary service that takes cancer patients to and from parts of west Cork and other areas across the county into Cork city every day. Everything is organised to perfection, except for the costs. There needs to be a budget set aside for those people here too.

I spoke to a plant hire person in the road building and building sector. They have all been exempted from this package that is being provided. They are all suffering. Someone who is in the plant hire business is out every day of the week with heavy machinery. That is something that needs to be looked at again.

In relation to the fishing industry, we have two types of fishers. We have the inshore fishermen who are working most of the day. They have no choice but to use petrol. They have been speaking to me about how they have to use pump petrol. They do not get a rebate for pump petrol. They go up to the pump and fill the drums-----

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: They go and fill the drums and come back.

Deputy Michael Collins: They fill the drums and put it into the boat and go out for the day and then go back and do the same thing. It is a continuous situation. I also then have those who are out there in the bigger trawlers throughout the country. I have correspondence from one of them. It states:

Hi Michael,

No word from our leaders. We have serious trouble with diesel. We have burned 2,500 in 24 hours. Our son was out on his last trip for 14 days. It cost him €31,000. It is not possible to keep going at that. We need help now, immediately, not in a month. We have 33 people working, all need money every week.

This is the crisis in which people find themselves. They are paying bills left, right and centre. There are reliefs for some of these but people are not sure how to get their hands on them or whether it will be another month or another six or eight weeks. Some of these people are in trouble right now and need those reliefs this very minute.

The Minister of State could throw back at me the fact that I did not support the package, but the reason was because the Government has tailored the carbon tax and all the increases in the carbon tax into it. I will never support anything that will hurt the Irish people. The Government has a programme scheduled whereby we can kick the can down the road until October and then hit people with a double, triple or quadruple increase. That is not the way to go. It is not a sign of a caring Government. It is a greedy, grabbing Government that wants projects and that maybe wants specialised projects. We have to look at projects. Some of the projects that can wait have to be sidelined, such as, maybe, the greenways and double cycleways. I was with Noel Thomas in Galway recently. Everyone in every house I visited in the housing estate there was livid about these double cycleways as opposed to single cycleways. They asked where the money is coming from and how we are spending that type of money. It is wasted money as far as they were concerned.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. We need to look at sectors that have been left behind. On home heating oil, I know there were a good few proposals in relation to hydrotreated vegetable oil, HVO. The statistics I am hearing are that HVO would cut emissions by 90%, but there is still a lot of taxes on it. That needs to be looked at. There is nothing there for people right around the country who are using home heating oil.

The other side, which was brought up earlier, relates to plant hire. The first thing that goes into every house is a digger and either a dump truck or a dump trailer. It relates to every part of that including all the ground works, the water, the sewers and the roads. The Minister of State knows it from his county. The big contractors are down there. There is a problem with the price of diesel for all those jobs and what they are priced at. Maybe there are clauses in some of those contracts with the councils or roads authorities but there are ordinary contractors who build houses and they are left out of this loop altogether.

The second part, and I have talked about it a number of times, is that we still have lorry drivers who have, say, a quarry and who do not need the haulage licence. There was a fund brought in over €1.57 plus VAT in relation to a war emergency fund, but there is nothing in the rebate for them. They are as important as people bringing meal from a mill who have their

own lorries. People do not need a haulage license to carry their own product. That sector seems to still be forgotten about. I ask the Minister of State to re-examine that.

Deputy Paul Lawless: The people of County Mayo and the rest of the country are desperate in terms of the costs of fuel. This Government has acted with complete impunity when it comes to accountability. First, it blamed the protesters. Then it blamed the media for covering the protesters and threatened an investigation. Then it blamed Trump. Earlier, I heard Ministers blaming international markets, international pricing structures, etc., but who made us reliant on international markets? It was the Government in terms of its policy. The previous Government, of which the Minister of State was a member, banned oil and gas exploration. It stripped away any ability for us to be energy independent. It created this dependency and then, when prices escalated, it blamed the dependency that it created. That is a fact. It is time that this Government accepted accountability, not just for the mishandling of the crisis but also for the situation in which we find ourselves in terms of our energy reliance.

The fact is that the infrastructure for renewable energy, as the Minister of State well knows, is not there at the moment. In relation to the escalating costs, it was the previous Government's policy to actually drive up costs.

The Government introduced the carbon tax. It was designed to drive the cost of energy. The Government did it in such a way that it was legislated for and baked in several years ago irrespective of the costs in the future. That is why the Minister of State's comments about carbon tax last week were tone deaf. The carbon tax was designed to try to move people away from fossil fuels. If you are a farmer in Mayo who is seeking to spread slurry or fertiliser, or cut silage, you do not have an alternative. The Minister of State should know that. This escalation of prices has unravelled the Government's policy on carbon tax and its desire for high energy costs. That is the truth of the matter. It is the Minister of State's desire and that of his Government. It is time that they wake up, accept it and change that policy because it is hurting rural Ireland and the Irish economy. Who knows where the cost of fuel is going to go over the next number of months and years? I opposed and voted against that Bill. The reason I did so was because I will not vote for a carbon tax into the future. It is wrong to penalise our Irish citizens who have no alternative.

The taxation of fuel is incredibly excessive. The vast majority of what we pay is on Government taxation. Over the past ten years, the Government has taken in €35 billion. In 2020 alone, it took in €4 billion and that tax take is rising, year on year. The Minister of State made an argument for carbon tax but he should know that reliable and regular public transport does not exist in Mayo. If you want to commute from Ballyhaunis or Ballinrobe to Castlebar or Westport on a daily basis, you cannot do so. The Minister of State knows that.

Is it right and just that the farmers, hauliers and contractors are, in the main, paying the carbon tax that is going, in many cases, to retrofits, etc.?

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

Deputy Paul Lawless: We need to have a conversation on this. The Economic and Social Research Institute, ESRI, came out with a report recently that outlined there is a minimal difference-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: You should conclude, Deputy.

Deputy Paul Lawless: -----between an A-rated house and a G-rated house in terms of energy consumption and yet Fine Gael councillors in Mayo are seeking to spend-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Lawless, you should conclude.

Deputy Paul Lawless: -----over €2 million on a council chamber. I heard a councillor last week justifying this-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Shouting does not get you anywhere. The Deputy is over his time and should end. I call Deputy Callaghan.

Deputy Catherine Callaghan: I acknowledge on the record what people are feeling across the country right now. I understand that families are anxious. Older people are worried about heating their homes. Farmers and small businesses are watching costs rise, week by week. Their concerns are genuine and they deserve to be treated with seriousness, respect and empathy.

The war in Iran has destabilised global energy markets. This is a reality that none of us in this House can change but what we can control is how we respond at home. The Government has responded with the largest and most comprehensive support package in the EU to help cushion the impact of the conflict in the Gulf. The fuel disruption we are seeing is a direct consequence of that war in Iran and the disruption of global supply routes. That is not something Ireland caused but it is something that this Government has acted in targeted ways, on a sector-by-sector basis, to help to offer some much-needed relief to the citizens of Ireland.

To manage expectations, there is no government in the whole world that can insulate an entire country from the financial impact of a global war. This war is showing no signs of ending so we need to focus on longer-term thinking. That is why, as a backbench TD for Carlow-Kilkenny, I am asking, in particular, for the Government to look towards giving further relief to householders by providing a targeted emergency fuel allowance for people who do not currently benefit from the fuel allowance to assist in the increasing price of kerosene. I would like employers who have remote-capable roles allow people to stay at home and work from home, thereby easing the pressure on commuters. I would like an SEAI retrofit blitz for Carlow-Kilkenny and an expansion of Local Link, demand-responsive transport in rural areas with little or no bus service. Farmers, agricultural contractors and hauliers are paying higher diesel costs now so we need to ensure that the fuel subsidy support scheme that has been introduced will be paid out quickly. From speaking with the Minister, Deputy Heydon, I understand that will happen.

Deputy Gillian Toole: As others have said, the crisis and the knock-on cost of living, which has arisen because of variables completely outside of our control in this country, have brought us to this point. They have also brought us to the point where we have to collaborate and co-operate, and engage in serious problem solving across the Chamber to try to alleviate the stress, anxiety and financial pressure that everybody is under at this point.

There has been criticism of tax breaks. I point out that excise duty on petrol is down by 36%. On diesel, it is down by 47.7%. On green diesel, it is down by 30.8%. Our overheads in northern Europe are not the equivalent of those in southern Europe. Wages, etc., differ by 30% to 50% so we are not comparing like with like. I welcome the pause on carbon tax but at this point, a full review of carbon tax and the proportionality of it and the apportionment of it is required. There are opportunities for us. There was an excellent conversation on EnergyCloud and the targeting of the surplus energy to those in fuel poverty, and I think that is a matter we must examine as a matter of urgency.

Accountability and efficiency are required to achieve balanced budgets, going forward. We all have needs and demands. The people who have put us into the House have charged us with those. Whether in respect of education, special education or healthcare, we must remember that budgets are limits and not targets. While we want to give more to people, it has to be done in a balanced manner and with a view to the evolving needs. However, the situation we are in at the moment is an uncontrollable variable beyond this country. It has to be managed on a day-by-day basis to ensure the outcome for everybody.

Deputy Barry Heneghan: I know where this motion comes from. People are under real pressure. Energy prices are too high and families and businesses in my constituency are contacting me daily. I will be clear about today's motion of confidence and why we need a functioning Government to bring in these measures. I heard people across the Chamber say that Independents have betrayed the people. Betraying the people would be political point-scoring for a few extra seats for a party and causing disarray in the Government at the time of highest geopolitical risk that has existed in my lifetime. We need a stable Government right now to bring in the financial supports that we brought in tonight. That was not relayed to the public. When I was on the phone to people who were asking me to vote no confidence in the Government, I told them that if the Government were to fall, it would be unable to bring in financial supports. That information was not relayed by political parties that were screaming for this. There would be no legislation or reform to our energy system. The private wire legislation, which is in the programme for Government and will help the Irish people, would not be able to progress. Every single solution we are discussing today would not be able to progress. Without a functioning Government, nothing would be happening. There would be no reform to infrastructure or to delivery. The people of Ireland would not benefit. Some people would say that Independents are lining their pockets, but we are not. We are benefiting our constituents and the people of Ireland by creating a stable Government that will benefit them.

The decision I made today might be seen as bad by my constituents but they will know it was from the bottom of my heart and that I did it for the best reason to allow them to benefit from financial measures that will come in the coming weeks. We do not know where this current geopolitical situation will go. We must benefit the vulnerable and build a resilient system that protects Irish people and does not expose them.

There is global instability with the conflict and the attacks on energy. We have seen what Trump and Netanyahu have done in the past two days, and it needs to be addressed.

Deputy Carol Nolan: At the fuel protests in Offaly, I was delighted to stand with my constituents, hard-working, decent people who have worked hard and are very frustrated. I

met groups in Birr, Tullamore and Cloghan. Many self-employed people told me they just cannot keep going. Only today, I met a young businessperson who told me his business will be gone next week. This is shameful. The Government has neglected the working people of this country and squandered Irish taxpayers' money. When they want some of their own money back, they have to come, kicking, begging and screaming, for their own money and for assistance. What the Government has done is disgraceful. I do not understand it. We know that billions are being thrown at the asylum system. We know that €840 million went out in overseas aid. That was highlighted in budget 2026. It is disgraceful. Yet we have Irish people kicking, begging and screaming. People are in my offices every day of the week at absolute breaking point.

I am ashamed of what the Government has done. I am glad to say I am not part of it. It has gone in the wrong direction entirely. It is squandering money where it should not be squandered. Let us look at the children's hospital, overseas aid or the asylum system where we have unvetted migrants coming into the country all the time. That is fact. The Government is squandering money. It needs to stop. The Government needs to stand up for the hardworking Irish people, the farmers, hauliers, agricultural contractors and small businesses. They should not have to come kicking and screaming for money. The Government needs to listen to them. Why was the Government not out meeting them? Why was the Taoiseach not out in Cork meeting his constituents? That would have been true leadership. I am absolutely appalled. I am here to stand up and serve my constituents in Offaly. This is certainly something that will never be forgotten. The Government will reap the benefit at the ballot box.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I stood here on 24 March when the Taoiseach and Government announced just 3 cent of a reduction in the cost of green diesel and 2 cent on kerosene. I begged the Government from where I am standing now to listen to me and to come in and address it the following week. I said if it had forgotten or did not understand, I was pleading with it to rectify it. It was allowed to carry on and it went from bad to worse when a Minister gave €40 million again to Ukraine in the middle of it. It was like throwing gallons of petrol on the fire because people are feeling the pinch like never before. There is a package and the Minister of State can listen to me or not but there will be another occasion like today and maybe more than that.

In the package being given out, there is no mention of the cost of the diesel or doing anything about the diesel for construction machines that are involved in the building of houses, such as the high rise cranes, the diggers digging the foundations or putting in the services underground, whether they are mini-diggers or larger diggers. There is something, though not enough, for farmers and agricultural contractors but there is nothing at all for civil contractors. I am asking the Government not to ignore me and not to forget it because there is much consternation that it has not been addressed. I feel the reason it has not been addressed is that the Government kept a lot of people out of the talks who had things to say. There were plenty of rooms around Dáil Éireann for the Government to talk to them in and it just did not want to. Will the Government give the people down the country the feeling that the Dáil appreciates them, that they are wanted and needed and that they will be looked after properly because that has not been happening?

Deputy Brian Brennan: I welcome the package presented on Sunday and recognise we are living in unprecedented times. We simply cannot forecast where this is going or predict where it will end. When the first fuel package was released, the response to the agriculture sector was simply insufficient and an insult to a critical cornerstone of our economy. Many members of the agriculture sector were on their knees long before this fuel crisis. Will the Minister of State please reassure farmers, contractors, the haulage sector and the fishing industry that this package will be continually reviewed in light of the fluid and volatile situation in the Middle East? On the supports available, can he ensure there will be a simple, swift and effective claims process so our constituents will not be weighed down by additional paperwork and bureaucracy? We pride ourselves on the quality of our agrifood. We are known all over the world for the high standard of the food we produce. What about the producers, the farmers, fishermen and contractors? Are we supporting them enough and do we respect the work they do? Based on the conversations I have had with many in this sector, long before this fuel crisis, the answer to that question is "No". We need to act on this and we need to act swiftly. On home heating, I acknowledge there has been an expansion of the fuel allowance payment scheme but we need to do more.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Alan Dillon): I move amendment No. 1:

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

"notes that the Government:

- remains deeply concerned about the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and Gulf;
- continues to seek de-escalation through dialogue and diplomacy so that these issues can be resolved;
- recognises and understands the pressures that have arisen due to rising fuel costs as a result of war in Ukraine and the Middle East, on all families and businesses;
- affirms that energy affordability is a priority for this Government, and highlights that successive Budgets have provided targeted support to help households with cost-of-living pressures;
- 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;

recognises that:

- carbon tax is a key pillar underpinning the Government's Climate Action Plan to halve emissions by 2030, and reach net zero no later than 2050;
- analysis undertaken using SWITCH, the ESRI tax and benefit model, to simulate the impact of the carbon tax increase, and the compensatory welfare package estimates that the net impact of the combined measures is progressive and that half of households are better off due to the measures part-funded by additional carbon tax funds, with households in the bottom four income deciles benefitting the most; and

— 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, which will be achieved through the progressive decarbonisation of the Irish economy and society, and through the steps that will be taken to meet the Government's commitment to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050;

further notes that the previous package of supports announced by Government on 24th March, included measures that:

— reduced the Mineral Oil Tax applying to petrol, diesel and Marked Gas Oil (MGO) by 15, 20 and 3 cents, respectively, on a Value-Added Tax (VAT) inclusive basis, until 31st May, at a cost of €150 million;

— reduced the National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA) levy by nearly 2 cents, at a cost of €20 million in income forgone to NORA;

— reduced the cost of petrol, diesel and MGO at the pump by 17, 22 and 5 cents in total, on a VAT inclusive basis;

— provided targeted relief to haulage and bus passenger operators, by increasing the maximum repayment allowable under the Diesel Rebate Scheme from 7.5 cent up to 12 cent per litre of diesel, for the first two quarters of 2026, at a cost of €10 million; and

— extended the fuel allowance season by four weeks, to provide essential support to those most vulnerable to fuel poverty, at a cost of €70 million;

highlights that newly introduced measures will extend the duration of the reduced mineral oil tax rates from the end of May until the end of July, and apply further reductions to these rates by, on a VAT inclusive basis, 10 cent per litre on petrol, 10 cent per litre on diesel and 2.4 cent per litre on MGO, at an estimated cost of €260 million; and

furthermore, notes that the combined effect of the measures announced on 24th March, and on 12th April, are to:

— reduce the cost of diesel by 32 cent;

— reduce the cost of petrol by 27 cent;

— reduce the cost of MGO by 7.4 cent;

— postpone the increase in carbon tax scheduled for 1st May, until the Budget in October, at an estimated cost of €22 million;

— enhance the Transport Support Schemes for all haulage operators, local link and school transport providers, and some commercial operators, at a monthly cost of €40 million;

— introduce a Fuel Subsidy Support Scheme for farming and fisheries, at a cost of €100 million, to ensure that those most exposed to fuel price increases will receive meaningful assistance at the most critical time of year;

— be a significant response to real pressures being felt here, and globally;

— be one of the most comprehensive support packages in the European Union; and

— directly help people impacted by this unprecedented global crisis in energy supply resulting from the war in the Middle East."

I acknowledge this is very real for people across the country. The pressures, stress and genuine financial strain arising from fuel costs are putting enormous pressure on households, businesses and key sectors. As a Mayo TD and a member of the Government, in recent days, I have met people across my constituency and beyond. Many other Members have also referenced those hardworking people. Certainly, I have listened carefully and respectfully to those who have expressed deep frustration publicly and privately. They are asking simple and legitimate questions, such as why the costs are rising so sharply and what the Government is doing in response. They have a right to ask these questions and they deserve straight answers. That is why we are here today to implement a number of financial resolutions but also to give some further detail.

The fact remains that we are living in an unprecedented global energy crisis. This is not abstract. It is not theoretical and it did not happen somewhere else. It is real. It is immediate and it is being felt in every household and every sector of our economy. That is something many on the Opposition benches have failed to recognise tonight.

We live in a small, open economy and we are particularly exposed to global price shocks, especially during periods of geopolitical instability. The volatility we are seeing in international fuel markets is driven by events far beyond the borders of Ireland. The ongoing conflict and instability in the gulf and the Middle East are a real result and no government anywhere can fully insulate citizens from the shocks and the scale of this crisis. It is also important to recognise that we need to be honest with people about these realities, what the Government can do and what this Government has done in response, in a way that is timely, proportionate, reasonable and fair.

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion put forward by Sinn Féin this evening on fuel prices. It calls for maximum action to reduce costs and support workers, families and key sectors. Let us be clear. This is exactly what the Government has done. It has not ignored this problem. We have not delayed. We have not hidden behind slogans. We have acted decisively, responsibly and on the basis of the evidence put forward.

In March, we introduced an initial €250 million package. That included targeted supports designed to shield the households and businesses most exposed to the rising energy and fuel costs. Importantly, we were clear at that point that the measures would be kept under constant review. We did not pretend that one intervention would be enough in a volatile and fast-moving, global environment. We have continuously monitored developments in international energy markets.

In the past week we have seen, as a result of the escalating geopolitical instability, petrol prices have increased by approximately 4% to around €1.92 per litre. Diesel prices have also risen by approximately 12% to around €2.16 per litre. In response to those developments, the Government has acted again. We are now delivering a second package of supports costing more than €500 million, a substantial, comprehensive and far-reaching intervention. This package includes excise reductions on petrol, diesel and marked gas oil alongside targeted supports for the transport, farming, fishing and haulage sectors, which are the sectors that quite

literally keep the country moving and functioning. These measures are practical, measurable and immediate in their impact.

While they are targeted, they also provide relief right across society as a whole. This is not about choosing between households and businesses. It is about supporting both because both are under pressure and both are essential to a functioning economy.

It is important to contrast this approach with what often is heard from the Opposition. Instead of slogans, the Government has taken a balanced, evidence-based approach. We are monitoring developments closely, we are engaging directly with affiliated sectors and we are responding, not once, but twice, with substantial and credible supports. This is what responsible government looks like. It is also important to be honest about the constraints within which we operate. The Government does not act in a vacuum. While we can determine national taxation policy, policy options concerning fuel support measures must comply with the EU legislative framework. That includes the energy tax directive, VAT rules and the state aid regulations.

We are actively engaging with the European Commission to maximise the relief we can provide within these frameworks. That engagement matters and reflects the seriousness with which this Government approaches its responsibility - not promising what cannot be delivered, but delivering what we can, both lawfully and effectively.

Let us be clear about where pressure at the pump comes from and the one core driver of fuel pressure inflation, that is, global international crude oil markets, which dictate the prices. It is not this House and not this Government. Pretending otherwise might be politically convenient for some but it does not help families who are trying to make ends meet. The public deserves honesty and not easy soundbites.

Despite the global headwinds, Ireland is facing this period of uncertainty from a position of economic strength. Unemployment rates have remained below 5% for over four years, our economy continues to grow and we have run budget surpluses in recent years and expect to continue doing so over the medium term. That strength did not happen by accident. It is a result of careful economic management, disciplined public finances and responsible leadership. It is precisely because of that careful stewardship that we are able to act decisively now to support households, protect jobs and sustain critical sectors of our economy during a period of global disruption.

However, we are also being honest with the public. No set of measures, no matter how extensive, can fully shield everyone from a global crisis of this magnitude. The longer international instability continues, the greater the pressure on inflation, growth and household incomes. The reality should not be denied and should not be politicised. Responsibility requires telling people the truth even when it is uncomfortable.

At the same time, this crisis reinforces an important lesson for the future, namely, that we must reduce our dependency on fossil fuels and strengthen our own energy independence. That is why the Government remains committed to the transition to a decarbonised economy. We all recognise that reality. That transition takes time and we are in the process of that journey - we are not at the end of it, but we are getting there. In the meantime, there are sectors that remain heavily reliant on fossil fuels and they are particularly exposed to this crisis. That is

why the Government is acting with targeted, temporary and proportionate measures to alleviate pressures now while continuing to invest in a more secure and sustainable energy future.

I want to conclude by acknowledging the challenging and uncertain times we are living in. These are not easy times for households, businesses or the Government but leadership matters most when circumstances are difficult. The Government has acted and we will continue to act, not with rhetoric, but with delivery, not with populism, but with responsibility, and not with noise or instability, but with stability. For these reasons, I cannot accept this motion before the House and I instead present the Government's amendment. The motion ignores the facts, disregards the extensive actions already taken and offers no credible and costed alternative.

Deputy Réada Cronin: I will give the Minister of State the truth. The truth is that people are at breaking point and this Government is standing idly by, completely failing them. After a disastrous, stingy budget, families have been hit with soaring fuel prices. Filling the car or heating the home is simply unaffordable. This is not just pressure any more. We are at a crisis point now.

When people took to the streets to say enough was enough, what did this Government do? It ignored them, it refused to listen to them and it looked down its nose at them. The Government also ignored the people who could not protest like the carers and people with disabilities. The Government gave a disastrous response. The Government threatened the use of the people's own army against them to show just how out of touch it was. Home heating oil is at a 30-year high. Families are dreading their oil tanks running dry because they cannot even afford a partial fill. Petrol and diesel are heading for record highs. Meanwhile, workers, families, farmers, fishers and small businesses are being squeezed to the limit.

We know that Trump and Netanyahu's illegal war has caused this crisis in fuel prices but the truth is this is the Government in Ireland and it has a choice. It could give a decent cut to fuel costs, such as 25 cent off petrol and diesel, it could scrap excise on home heating oil and it could deliver real relief, but it will not. Instead, it sits on a massive surplus while our people are struggling to get by. Confidence in this Government is gone. I could not believe the number of phone calls my office got today from the most surprising people who were fuming with the Government. This motion is about standing with those people who have been ignored and left behind, including those who could not protest like the carers and people with disabilities. We have given the Government the solution and it should not forget whose money this is. This is the people's money and their taxes. What we are missing here is leadership. All that people can see is an arrogant Government that is completely out of touch with its people.

I want people to stop misleading the Dáil. The Comptroller and Auditor General stated that carbon tax was not ring-fenced the way people were led to believe, yet we have TDs coming into this Chamber who are still talking about it as if it is ring-fenced. Sinn Féin knows the carbon tax is a sop. It is just another revenue stream when the Government could take real action and commence the mass retrofitting of homes, ensuring supports are fair and equitable for people who cannot afford the expensive retrofits. However, when we have TDs in here misleading the Dáil and not even knowing that the carbon tax is not ring-fenced, what hope do we have?

Deputy Seán Crowe: I do not think it is a radical statement to say that the duty of any government is to protect its most vulnerable citizens from severe shocks to the greatest extent possible. I genuinely do not believe in this case that that is what happened. Unsustainably high energy and fuel prices in the State have made a pre-existing cost-of-living crisis even worse. I believe that the Government further compounded its failure to its citizens by not reconvening the Dáil last week and not introducing emergency supports. I agree with the words of my union, SIPTU, leader, John King, when he said, "Despite the cost of these measures, they contain little to no relief for the vast majority of workers and households, who are left completely exposed to a cost-of-living crisis and mounting inflation."

The question we ask here tonight is if this is fair? As we heard, home heating oil is the most expensive it has been in a generation. Petrol and diesel are on course to exceed the highest prices on record. Ordinary PAYE workers and their families are now bearing the brunt of the €500 million package but will see little benefit as their euro buys less food and other essential staples, like fuel and energy costs, continue to rise beyond their wages.

The protest last week should be a wake up call but there is no sense that the Government is listening. As one woman said to me during the week, the Government says it is listening but does not seem to hear anything. That seems to be the problem. The Government says it is listening, but is it? Can it hear the pain people are going through?

I agree with others that we must break the back of our dependency on fossil fuels by going all in on renewable energy but where is the just transition that was promised?

Why are data centres that are sucking the national grid dry not being forced to introduce district heating systems? That is something that could be done. It would not cost the State anything. It is happening in one of the data centres in my area. Why are ordinary households paying more for energy than the data centres? Why are we turning off renewable energy at night-time when vulnerable citizens are freezing in the homes? Will the Minister of State answer these questions at some stage?

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin: I was really proud during this past week to stand alongside so many sound people from Wexford and Wicklow - men, women and children - the finest of people who took to the roads out of sheer desperation in peaceful protest at a Government of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Independent TDs that simply was not listening to them. They demanded meaningful supports and real change. They got neither in the Chamber today. The Government survived but its days are numbered, judging by the anger on the street this evening. I met many of them outside. I have listened to many farmers, contractors, bus operators, taxi drivers, lorrymen, elderly people who cannot heat their homes, and couples commuting to Dublin every morning, of whom there are 6,500 from my area in the Wicklow-Wexford constituency. I have met many young lads on tractors who cannot make a living and may be driven out of this country. It is shameful that they would be robbed of a future in their own country while there is any amount of money available for data centre preferential policies. They get tens of millions of the people's money wasted on all sorts of pet projects while the people who need it cannot get it. The Government could have cut diesel and petrol prices by the maximum amount at the pumps as we proposed. It could have scrapped excise on home heating oil instead of leaving prices at double what they were before. It could have completely scrapped the carbon tax increase. It could have listened to all of these fine people struggling

with the cost-of-living crisis, but it just did not do so. Obviously, Trump and Netanyahu's war on the Middle East has caused huge chaos for the Irish people, as well as the slaughter of people in the Middle East, but the Government compounded the problem. The fact that it is taking €40 when someone puts €60 of petrol or diesel into their car is compounding the problem hugely.

During the week, nobody I met wanted to be out protesting on the roads. It was the Government's failure to act and listen to them that forced them into desperation. The Government showed huge arrogance, demeaned people and threatened to call in the Army, which was really shameful. We are approaching the anniversary of the Easter Rising on Friday week and it is worth remembering the famous Pearse quote. He wrote:

Beware of the thing that is coming, beware of the risen people,

Who shall take what ye would not give.

I know whose side I am on. The Government won the vote in the Chamber today but the battle is only just beginning.

Deputy Máire Devine: "Responsible" seems to have been the mantra from the other side all throughout the day as well as talk of how great those TDs all are but the Government did not read the room. It hid, it dithered and it ignored for months on end people who were trying to get it to listen to them about the hardships they were going through. The fuel issue last week was the straw that finally broke the poor camel's back. It certainly broke the back of the Minister of State earlier today. Years of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael incompetence and indifference have landed the whole of Ireland in an unenviable position of needing to flood the streets in rage in protest at what has not been done. Working people, families, and elderly and disabled people cannot afford to heat homes and gas up their vehicles while the Government grants data centres lower energy costs at a time of record profits for big oil and gas corporations. Trump's illegal war on Iran has exacerbated higher fuel prices and taxes, yet An Taoiseach remained silent on this despicable war and the chaos it imposed on the world when sitting face to face with that man. Trump's God complex may have had the Taoiseach in awe. However, more than this, the Government removed the cost-of-living supports and refused to bring prices under control. It voted down every Opposition proposal to help everyday people, including Sinn Féin's legislation a month ago to reduce the cost of petrol, diesel, including green diesel, and home heating oil. Now, when finally faced with the ire of the people and with the electorate awoken to its lack of governance, it brings forward insulting half measures that just do not cut it. It spends taxpayers' money slapping plasters on all of Ireland's problems rather than fixing the root causes.

The country is unsettled and demands leadership. People are sending a very loud message that they reject the Government's feeble attempts to deflect, pat itself on the back - that is what I have heard all day - and to twist the narrative, especially when it comes to Sinn Féin and what we heard earlier about the carbon tax and the obfuscation on that. It is a display of ignorance, I would imagine.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Keira Keogh): Go raibh maith agat, Deputy.

Deputy Máire Devine: The Government has lost the confidence of the people. Certainly, it lost the confidence of this side of the House a long time ago.

Amendment put.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Keira Keogh): In accordance with Standing Order 85(2), the division is postponed until the weekly division time on Wednesday, 15 April 2026.

Critical Infrastructure Bill 2026: Second Stage

Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (Deputy Jack Chambers): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I welcome the opportunity to bring the Critical Infrastructure Bill 2026 forward for consideration by the Dáil today. The Bill is a central pillar of the Government's infrastructure reforms. While its impact will be wide-ranging, it is a very clear and focused piece of legislation that is to the point. Its objective is to accelerate the provision of infrastructure in energy, transport, water and other sectors to get more housing built, make progress towards our climate objectives and support the continued social and economic development of our nation. Its rapid development and progression serve as a tangible demonstration of the Government's commitment to meaningfully accelerate those strategically important projects that are essential to the State's economic and social development.

The events of recent days have reinforced and underscored the central importance of critical infrastructure to the very functioning of our economy. We have also seen the severe consequences across our society when infrastructure fails. Ireland has long struggled with an infrastructural deficit. We have made some progress in closing this gap, with the difference between Ireland and our EU neighbours estimated to have halved over the past 30 years. A gap still remains, however, with most experts, international and domestic, suggesting the gap is equivalent to a 25% to 30% deficit in capital stock compared to our peers. What this means in practical terms is not enough housing to provide accommodation for our people, it means not enough renewable electricity to reach our climate targets and it means more time spent by many commuters frustrated in traffic. If we cannot build the infrastructure fast enough, this deficit will increase as our economy and population continue to grow. The risk this poses to our society is unacceptable. The global economic uncertainty makes the need for strong and resilient infrastructure even greater.

Our domestic and international competitiveness is the key to our continued economic success. Nationally, the single greatest challenge we face is delivering housing and housing-enabled infrastructure. According to the International Institute for Management Development, IMD's world competitiveness rankings 2025, we are one of the most competitive economies in the world. However, under the heading of infrastructure, our performance continues to lag behind some other developed nations. Within a few short years, we will face critical shortages of power and water alongside congestion across our transport networks. At a time when decarbonisation is among our highest priorities, we have the slowest approval processes for renewable electricity in the EU.

The case for change is clear. It is urgent and, as evidenced by the publication of this critical legislation in addition to the extensive package of reforms we are progressing, it is the Government's highest priority. The pace of infrastructure delivery over the coming years will determine our economic success, our climate resilience and the quality of life enjoyed by communities across the country. The effective and timely delivery of new infrastructure will be the single most important determinant of our future prosperity. Ireland is at a critical juncture. The pace of infrastructure delivery over the years to come will determine our economic competitiveness.

In terms of the guiding principle, the work undertaken to accelerate the deliver of infrastructure its to create the conditions where the essential goods and services people need are plentiful and where the focus is on what is delivered. Over the past 20 years, we have had lots of layering of new regulations and processes that have been designed to improve infrastructure delivery but many of them are having unintended consequences because of the sheer weight of them. If we want infrastructure to move, we must strip away what is unnecessary.

9 o'clock

Essential protections remain vital, but progress requires accepting some risk and being clear about priorities so we can reach a position where our future is defined by possibility rather than constant constraint. That requires the relevant water, power and transport infrastructure to fuel the needs of our economy and to supply the scale of housing that our population requires.

Since I was appointed Minister for public expenditure, I have made accelerating infrastructure my number one priority. An infrastructure division was formed in my Department in April last year, including staff from key semi-State agencies. We formed the a task force to provide strategic guidance and expert input. Six independent experts, experienced in infrastructure delivery, combined with six members, taken from those commercial semi-States at the front line of infrastructure development and the local government sector worked with my officials to identify the barriers to infrastructure and the solutions needed to overcome them. This was complemented by a public consultation launched in June. This consultation laid bare the huge concern over the pace and quality of infrastructure delivery in Ireland. Overly long timelines, fragmented governance and misalignment with climate and environmental goals all featured heavily in the views expressed.

In July, I published the Department 's assessment of the 12 most pressing barriers to infrastructure. This was not an exhaustive list; rather these 12 barriers were considered by the Department to represent the most impactful problems, delaying infrastructure provision. This assessment of barriers laid the foundation for the next phase of work, and in December last year, I published the Accelerating Infrastructure Report and Action Plan. This sets out a comprehensive programme of actions designed to speed up the delivery of critical infrastructure across the State. The plan sets out 30 targeted, time-bound actions grouped under four pillars, each addressing a key area of reform. The measures provide for a whole-of-government approach to ensure that capital investment translates into timely, co-ordinated delivery of the infrastructure. Legal reform is the first action pillar listed in the report and enacting legislation to accelerate the provision of critical infrastructure is the second.

This leads me on to the Bill we are discussing. I will briefly summarise what the Bill will do. It will allow the Government to designate certain infrastructure projects or programmes as critical. In response to this designation, all public bodies involved at any stage in the authorisation process for this infrastructure must prioritise and accelerate the authorisation process applied to the maximum extent possible while still meeting their other statutory duties. It also disapplies section 15 of the climate Act to their consideration of designated projects or programmes. By establishing a clear legal basis for prioritisation, it will reduce ambiguity and ensure that critical projects and programmes receive focused and co-ordinated attention across Departments, regulators and agencies. It will address the unacceptable delays in our infrastructure approval processes by mandating whole-of-State co-operation and creating a fast-track pathway for critical projects and programmes without skipping steps in the approval process or weakening any safeguards.

The Bill forms a central pillar of the Government's broader infrastructure acceleration agenda, signalling a significant shift toward fast-tracking strategically important projects deemed essential to the State's economic and social development. The Bill is focused, and I will through it section by section.

Section 1 is the interpretation. It notes that infrastructure is anything that enables the essential facilities and systems of the State to function effectively and includes, but is not limited to: transport facilities, including ports and airports, and transport systems, including roads and railways; energy generation, transmission and distribution systems; and water supply, wastewater and waste management systems. It further sets out that a project is something the purpose of which is the delivery of infrastructure, and is funded by capital investment, by or on behalf of the State or by on behalf of a public body. A programme is simply a collection of two or more projects that are intended to achieve a common purpose. Finally, it is worth noting that the section defines an authorisation as an award, approval, decision, licence, consent, permit or other authority required, granted or made, by or under an enactment or otherwise, to enable a project or programme to proceed in whole or in part.

Fundamentally, this section sets out the necessary underpinning terms that describe the specifics of what the provisions in the Bill apply to. As I have consistently stated, the focus for acceleration will be on the critical infrastructure necessary to underpin the development of all other infrastructure in the country. Every development, regardless of purpose, needs energy, water and a transport link to operate. If we can accelerate the provision this fundamental network infrastructure, it will lead to broader momentum and acceleration across all other types of development, particularly housing. To be eligible for inclusion, this infrastructure must be built by or on behalf of the State.

Section 2 simply notes that nothing in the Bill will affect existing or future obligations of the State under EU law. This is included to demonstrate that the Bill will not interfere in any way with our EU commitments, whether they relate to environmental protection or climate change targets or more broadly.

Section 3 deals with how projects or programmes will be designated as critical infrastructure. The Minister for public expenditure will make a recommendation to Government in respect of an individual project or programme. The Government will consider the recommendation and, if approved, an order designating a project or programme as critical infrastructure will be laid before this House. The section also lists those factors that the

Minister may have regard to in making a recommendation to the Government. An administrative process will be put in place to facilitate those recommendations but I do not plan to commence this process until after the Oireachtas has approved this legislation. As such, I reiterate that my priority will be on recommending those projects or programmes that facilitate critical infrastructure across the energy, transport and water sectors with a particular focus on infrastructure that will support additional housing but the legislation specifically does not preclude other infrastructure types.

Section 4 determines who the provisions of this Bill apply to. In short, a relevant public body is any public body which has a role in the approval process for designated infrastructure. This means anyone in the development chain who must give an approval, licence, consent, permission or any kind of authorisation for the infrastructure. This is a deliberately wide net to ensure that the acceleration process will be comprehensive.

Section 5 is the core aspect of the Bill. It sets out the specific duties that will be applied to relevant public bodies. There are six core duties that they will be required to perform on the enactment of this Bill.

First, public bodies will be required to prioritise any functions they must perform in relation to designated critical infrastructure projects or programmes above their other duties. Next, each public body must take all necessary steps to accelerate their consideration of the designated project or programme and avoid any undue delays. Followed by this, the relevant public body must reduce the time required for any decision in relation to a project or programme. They must make every effort to parallel their processes with the authorisations that may be required by other public bodies. Next, they are required to co-ordinate, prioritise and sequence their functions in respect of managing risks and constraints. Finally, a public body must allocate the resources that may be required to fulfil its duties under the Bill.

The Bill does not dictate the decision that public bodies must reach. Instead, it sets out a clear articulation of the number of projects or programmes that the Government considers vital to the public interest and mandates that public bodies need to accelerate their decision-making processes with regard to these projects. This idea has been developed following on from the engagement I have had with respect to many of these public bodies. Specifically, they have been clear that a focussed articulation of what the most important projects are will be beneficial. I am confident that providing this and giving public bodies the obligation but also the *vires* to accelerate their decision-making processes will lead to much faster decision making in respect of identified projects.

Section 6 allows the Minister for public expenditure to issue directions to any relevant public bodies. These directions may require the provision of information on the measures that the public body has adopted and the outcome of these actions. The purpose of this is to allow for a tracking and evaluation of the actions taken by each public body and the impact these actions may have had on the approval timelines for a designated project or programme. The provision also allows direction to be issued requiring a public body to adopt such measures as may be deemed necessary for the purposes of carrying out its duties.

Section 7 disapplies section 15 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 from designated projects and programmes. This is the only substantive change that is being made to existing legislation and I will shortly outline the reasons for this.

Section 8 provides for regulations to be issued under the Bill when enacted. The only power for regulations is to allow additional public bodies to be designated in the event of any other legal change that might mean a body has a function in relation to a designated project or programme but is not captured within the definitions.

Section 9 is a standard provision that allows for any expenses incurred in the administration of the Bill when enacted to be paid out of moneys provided by the Oireachtas.

The final section of the Bill sets out the Short Title and commencement of the Bill. We want to advance this as quickly as possible.

The Bill effectively disapplies section 15 of the climate change Act from those projects and programmes that are designated as critical infrastructure by the Government. It does not mean that climate considerations will be set aside in these projects.

Every Exchequer-funded project is already required to measure and price its greenhouse gas emissions under the infrastructure guidelines. Similarly, every individual project is also required to undergo a climate adaptation assessment to ensure it does not give rise to undue risks. All other climate and environmental obligations will still apply, such as building regulations and the use of low-carbon cement in construction.

It was never intended that the climate action Act would be used to allow the decisions taken by public bodies in relation to individual projects or programmes to be challenged in the courts. Disapplication of section 15 removes an unnecessary layer that is driving a wider increase and risk around judicial reviews. It is abundantly clear that some of these reviews are being taken for ideological reasons, often steeped in a degrowth agenda that seeks to frustrate the delivery of critical infrastructure, some of which can be connected to renewable projects. That is not an agenda that is supported by this Government. The accelerating infrastructure report and actions also commit to the development of a robust emergency powers framework that can meaningfully accelerate the delivery of critical infrastructure. The work on this legislation is proceeding in parallel this year.

The Government's prudent management means there is money to deliver across an ambitious capital investment programme. In the past five years, more than €65 billion has been invested in capital infrastructure projects across our country through the national development plan, NDP. Over the next ten years, that will rise to €275 billion. Total capital investment in 2026 alone is expected to reach €19.1 billion. This is the largest capital investment programme the State has ever seen. However, if this funding is to be delivered and if its outcomes are to be as expected, funding needs to be matched with reform. The accelerating infrastructure report is one of the most ambitious reform agendas ever adopted by the State. It is a cornerstone across this legislative agenda today, but also in the context of the emergency powers framework we are working on.

The Bill is all about accelerating the delivery of critical infrastructure for our country. It will do so by prioritising those projects that the Government identifies and this House endorses above all others. It will create a fast-track channel for these projects through existing authorisation processes. Relevant public bodies will have to consider how each of them can reprioritise within their organisations and work better with other agencies while still undertaking the respective due diligence required for each project. There will still be public participation at each stage of the development process, and the legislation will not change this.

With regard to the changes in the climate Act, the only practical impact of this Bill will be to remove an avenue for judicial reviews, one that, in my view, is being used to delay rather than accelerate climate action in some instances.

The Bill is ambitious, but ambition is what is required if we are to meet the infrastructure needs of our population. I hope that we can have a robust debate and engagement today on the Bill. It will not weaken climate protections and it will not diminish public participation in infrastructure development. Rather, it allows the Government, with the endorsement of this House, to identify the most critical infrastructure projects and provides public bodies with the *vires* to treat these projects with the urgency they absolutely need. I look forward to working with everyone in this House in bringing forward and advancing this legislation in the coming weeks.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Is é buninfreastruchtúr ceann de na rudaí is tábhachtaí d'aon cheantar nó pobal atá ina gcónaí i gceantar tuaithe ach go háirithe, áit go minic nach bhfuil ann. Mar gheall air sin, ar ndóigh, is maith an rud é go bhfuilimid á phlé seo agus ag breathnú air. Tá súil agam go gciallóidh sé go ndíreoidh an Rialtas ar chúrsaí infreastruchtúr, ach go háirithe sna ceantair cosúil leis an gceantar in atá mé féin i gConamara. Critical infrastructure is something I have been raising with the Minister for a long time, specifically basic infrastructure, something we often just do not have in the west of Ireland. Critical infrastructure is the bedrock of a strong, functioning economy. Housing, health, transport, water and energy are the essentials - the necessities - to be able to work, to be able to be healthy and to be safe. We desperately need critical infrastructure to be delivered.

This is a deficit created by chronic underfunding and a lack of ambition from successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael governments. I am keen to engage with any proposals from the Government to address this infrastructural deficit, but, to my mind, this Bill in front of us falls at the first hurdle. It is a Critical Infrastructure Bill without a definition of "critical infrastructure". Under this legislation, it would solely be at the Minister's discretion to designate projects as critical infrastructure. In practice, this means that a Minister could decide that a new data centre, a premium office block or a new stadium is critical infrastructure and, as such, would be fast-tracked through that delivery pipeline, while real critical infrastructure, including homes, hospitals, roads, railways and bridges, i gConamara ach go háirithe, are not guaranteed critical status and could be left by the wayside and not sped up at all. To be honest, I believe this omission is a huge oversight. Clearer guidelines have to be included in this legislation as to what actually constitutes "critical infrastructure". I will be putting in amendments in relation to this aspect.

Sílim gurb í an fhadhb is mó atá ann mar gheall ar chúrsaí infreastruchtúir ná nach bhfuil muinín ag daoine go ndéanfaidh Fine Gael agus Fianna Fáil beart de réir a mbriathar. The Government just simply cannot be trusted on infrastructure delivery. The infrastructure that has been prioritised by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael over the last decades has failed people. It has served big business over the interests of working people and families. We are the data centre capital of Europe. Brand-new office blocks are sitting empty and our cities are full of new hotels instead of new homes. Yet investment in the critical infrastructure really needed has been delayed or discontinued. There has been inaction, delays and bad value for taxpayer's money. This is the track record of critical infrastructural delivery by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael,

a record best known by the projects that have still not been delivered, not least the national children's hospital.

All the Government's attempts so far to speed up infrastructure delivery have had the opposite effect. The disastrous strategic housing development legislation introduced in 2017 caused havoc in the planning system, only to be replaced by the equally ineffective large-scale residential development legislation. Every single time the Government tries to speed up delivery, it slows it down. The biggest obstacle to delivering critical infrastructure with urgency has always been Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in government.

Before the recess, the Government used its majority in the infrastructure committee to waive this legislation from having necessary pre-legislative scrutiny. We did push a vote on this, and it was very disappointing that pre-legislative scrutiny could not have been accommodated on something as important as this legislation. This was done without providing the committee with a finished copy of the legislation. I think that was totally and utterly unacceptable. It meant we did not get a chance to hear from experts in relation to the legislation. We did not get a chance to hear from Uisce Éireann, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, the HSE, environmental groups, housing associations and many other groups that have been suffering as a result of the lack of critical infrastructure being delivered.

I hope that this legislation is not rushed now on Committee Stage, and that it will be given the time needed. We must make sure that critical infrastructure is actually done right. We are going to engage on Committee Stage and, of course, bring in our amendments in relation to this legislation. We are going to scrutinise this legislation with our eyes totally and utterly wide open. It was really unfortunate, though, that pre-legislative scrutiny was not allowed.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Sinn Féin will support measures that genuinely speed up the delivery of critical infrastructure, and there is no question that this State needs urgent investment and delivery at scale. This Government has a clear problem with delivery. Communities are repeatedly told that projects are coming, funding is allocated and plans are in place, but what they experience instead are delays, stalled timelines, missed deadlines and a lack of urgency.

The infrastructure deficit we face today has been built up over decades. Communities across the State have been left waiting while projects are delayed, scaled back or abandoned altogether. You cannot build on top of announcements. You cannot drive on announcements. You cannot grow an economy on announcements or on plans and strategies. This Government cannot be trusted on infrastructure delivery. Its record is one of inaction, delay and poor value for money time and time again. We now have legislation that does not even clearly define what "critical infrastructure" is in its own title. It does not define the term and that is a serious weakness. It gives the Minister, and whoever is the Minister of the day, wide discretion to designate projects, creating a real risk that developments will be fast-tracked without proper scrutiny, while the infrastructure that people actually rely on continues to fall behind.

The Government can designate and announce as much as it likes, but it will all be judged on whether it delivers. Nowhere is the failure to deliver starker than in Waterford and across the south east.

The south east has 9% of the State's population yet receives just 1.8% of major capital spending. It now has the lowest level of *per capita* investment of any region in the State. None of that is an accident. It reflects a clear and sustained pattern of neglect that cannot be ignored. The consequences of that neglect are visible across Waterford. The urgent safety upgrades to the N25 in Waterford are stalled, while the N24 has not progressed. Public transport investment lags far behind demand. The Waterford to Rosslare line has been shelved and there have been cuts to wider rail services, including the Waterford to Dublin route. As the Minister knows, Waterford Airport was left without proper State backing, to the point that a private investor had to step in to fund the runway extension.

In healthcare, University Hospital Waterford still does not have full 24-7 cardiac care. In education, the South East Technological University continues to receive the lowest level of funding of any technological university. Water and wastewater infrastructure is acting as a direct barrier to housing and development, with urgent upgrades needed in Lismore, Bunmahon, Crook, Passage, Portlaw and beyond, yet these projects are repeatedly deprioritised. In Dunmore East, the fishing harbour requires development to support the local industry. The wider harbour has clear potential for tourism, while cé Helvic i nGaeltacht na nDéise remains effectively unusable due to the lack of dredging there. In housing, targets have been missed to such an extent that people are now struggling to live and remain in their own communities. Entire villages and towns are facing a demographic cliff edge.

That is the lived reality of infrastructure failure in Waterford. For rural communities, the impact is even more acute. When infrastructure is delayed or denied it is rural towns and villages that feel it first and hardest. Without roads, public transport, water and wastewater capacity and healthcare provision, there is no foundation for growth. If this legislation is to have any credibility, it must focus on prioritising the infrastructure that communities actually need, alongside clear accountability for delivery and fair, balanced regional investment. Waterford and the south east and rural communities across the State deserve the same level of ambition, investment and delivery as anywhere else.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I hope the Critical Infrastructure Bill will not represent yet another failure for rural Ireland, which for too long has been left behind with regard to investment in infrastructure. Nowhere is that more evident than in the state of our regional and local roads, which are in urgent need of investment, and also our wastewater treatment plants and water infrastructure. In Mayo, our roads are lifelines for our communities. However, years of underinvestment have left many of these roads in poor condition, placing a daily burden on residents and undermining economic development.

Many times in this House, I have asked for the R312 connecting the Erris region and Castlebar to be designated a strategic regional road so that it receives the necessary funding to be upgraded and improved for the many people who rely on it daily. A friend of mine was travelling on the R312 a couple of weeks ago when the Fitbit device on her wrist hand went off to indicate she was working out. This is the absolute truth. Anyone who has travelled to the R312 will know exactly what is meant by that. The road from Belmullet to Castlebar, the R312, is absolutely horrendous and we have asked for years, if not decades, to have it strategically designated. There is no point in having a Wild Atlantic Way and all kinds of advertisements if we do not have the basic infrastructure. The R312 is the main road connecting Castlebar hospital with Erris. We talked here a number of weeks ago about Stephen Lavelle from

Belmullet who lost his life while waiting for an ambulance. The R312 was the last road he travelled. It is just crazy. Rural Ireland cannot reach its full potential if its infrastructure continues to lag behind.

Households wait for years on end to get funding for roads under the local improvement scheme, LIS. We are talking about critical infrastructure. For people who need to access their homes, it is critical that they have a road to drive on. They pay property tax and other taxes, yet they are denied basic access. I was in Belderrig in north Mayo a couple of weeks ago and one of the roads I drove on was covered in huge potholes. I was embarrassed, but if I had been in government all these years, I would be absolutely ashamed. No one takes responsibility. People have to wait and wait for repairs which never come. The list of LIS roads gets longer and longer. Where is the accountability and funding? We are not looking for highways, just roads that are fit to drive on.

I raised the issue of maintenance and repairs for piers with the Taoiseach. The tragic death of Joachim McNulty, who drowned when his car slipped on algae on Belderrig pier, would have been avoided if the proper maintenance and safety features were done on the pier. That is critical infrastructure.

If we take, for example, Mayo University Hospital and Belmullet hospital, every time there is an election there is announcement, and then another, while people wait for projects that are never delivered and are critical to communities.

The Minister is familiar with the Newport sewerage scheme. We are now told we will have to wait until 2030 for that. For heaven's sake, these are vital pieces of infrastructure that need to be done for the people of Newport. The crazy thing about it is that businesses in Newport have to pay for the sewerage going into the bay. It is just wrong and cannot continue. I hope that in some way this Bill will serve to address that. The strategic development zone, SDZ, around Knock Airport has to be done as well and it must be speeded up. We cannot wait any longer.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Hear hear.

Deputy Martin Kenny: The situation with regard to infrastructure around the country is poor, to say the least. In rural areas and the north west it is extremely poor. I will mention a few of the issues. The south Leitrim water scheme, which provides water for more than two thirds of the population of County Leitrim, is currently operating at more than 100% capacity. It is meant to operate at 80% capacity so there is little spare capacity, but it is operating at over 100%. If someone in the region looks for planning permission to build 100 houses, and one of the key infrastructural issues is housing, they cannot get a letter from Irish Water to say they will get water because the water is not available. That is just one example of a major infrastructural problem that is blocking progress and people having some chance of having a home to live in. They cannot build because the infrastructure is not in place.

One of the key pieces of infrastructure along the west coast is the western rail corridor. We have been talking for years about what can be done and the positive impact reopening that rail link from Sligo right down that corridor would have on the entire western seaboard. That project needs to be prioritised. Reports have been done but the problem with many of the

reports on the western rail corridor is that they look at the issue in a very narrow way. When they check how many people would use the rail line, they use the number of people living within 5 km of the line. The rail line to Dublin goes past my house. Most people travel 30 or 40 miles to get to the railway. It is a much bigger piece of infrastructure that could service a lot more people than those living within a narrow corridor around it. It is critical that that infrastructure is put in place.

Health is another major issue. In Sligo University Hospital we have serious problems with overcrowding, insufficient bed numbers and the age of the infrastructure. The roof of the theatre for orthopaedics leaked last summer. When the roof was fixed it was then discovered there was another problem with the heating. For the past year, the theatre has been closed more often than it has been open. That is because that particular piece of infrastructure has aged out. It is not fit for purpose and needs to be built out anew. We have a similar problem with regard to renal services. People attend the hospital for dialysis but again, the services in place are totally inadequate. Promises have been made but nothing has been delivered.

We have serious problems with road infrastructure in my constituency and everywhere else. The problem seems to be that Governments continually look at where the crisis is rather than planning long term for the future, which is what needs to happen. We need a Government that will plan for the future and provide services and critical infrastructure for people in order that we have an economy that functions. Most of the west, including my part of the country, has the greatest potential because it has the least investment. The eastern seaboard is bursting at the seams. Nobody can get a house to rent in Dublin, yet in other parts of the country where there is ample space and opportunity, there is no investment.

That is what we need to get balanced right. We need to get proper rail and road infrastructure in the regions, we need to get proper investment into the regions, and we need to ensure we can do that by having investment from the Government. These are not costs the taxpayer will bear and are then gone forever. They are investments that will pay off dividends in the long run. This is why it is absolutely critical the Government recognises the need to provide the maximum amount of funding for key projects in areas where we have the most potential, particularly in areas in the north west, throughout the midlands and throughout the western seaboard where we have the same issues.

People always say to me that when they educate their children, most of them will be getting jobs for graduates and a lot of those graduate jobs are elsewhere, not back in their own region. The main reason is that they do not have the infrastructure to get those jobs to move into the region. One example was presented to me the other day and when I saw it, I wondered what was wrong. We meet the Atlantic Technological University every year as part of our engagement with IBEC. The university has for years been looking for the Government to allow it to borrow money to build its own student accommodation on its own land. That is what it has looked to do. Probably for the last five or six years, every time we have met the university, it has asked, "Can you please lobby the Government so that we can have the right to borrow money to build the houses so we can have them into the future and we can rent them out to the students?" It would be an income source for the university. Last week, the Minister announced that there is going to be a public private partnership. A private corporation or company is going to come in and build those houses, rent them out to the students and make the money on them, with land owned by the university. It is again back to this thing of providing an opportunity

for the well-connected rather than providing something that would provide a piece of critical infrastructure for the people who need it, the students in that region and everywhere else.

This is one of the problems this Government has. Everything it does, all of the time, is to look after the well-connected rather than the people who elected them and who they should be looking after, up and down the length and breadth of this nation.

Deputy Ged Nash: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important Bill. I will be sharing time with my colleagues Deputies Conor Sheehan and George Lawlor. It is a short Bill at just ten pages and comprising ten sections, but it is of real and critical significance to our economy and our society. The infrastructure deficit in our country is perhaps the biggest single economic challenge we have. As the Minister recounted earlier, the IMF has estimated that Ireland is looking at an infrastructure deficit, or physical infrastructure gap, of about 32% relative to the economies that we compare ourselves against. The quality gap is 27%. To make a political point, that is the legacy of underinvestment from successive Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil Governments and it has left us lagging behind. Successive Governments over the last ten years have, frankly, been crippled by their own conservatism and they have shown a risk aversion to engaging in the kinds of developments we require to move our economy along, to address our climate challenge and to improve our society.

Nobody here needs a history lesson. We know that we have had at least ten years of real problems where, due to the economic collapse, we simply did not have the resources to provide the infrastructure this country requires, but we have had the resources since 2016 and few efforts were made to address that deficit and the gap. Those chickens are coming home to roost. I said before the last election, and it was not a pithy throwaway remark, that based on our experience the biggest threat to the Irish economic model was not the return of Donald Trump to the White House but the re-election of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. I am pleased to see, however, that there is at least a new impetus and a new focus on the delivery of the infrastructure we require in this country. We have managed to waste a boom over the last decade. A lot of the social and economic problems we are experiencing now, and the challenges that households and businesses are facing, are a direct result of that. We are sitting on record tax receipts but we have allowed our infrastructure gap to widen and widen.

This is not an abstract point or an abstract debate. The infrastructure gap and its implications are something that every citizen of this country sees and experiences every day, such as the hospital wings that have been promised but not delivered, the bridges that are never built, the renewable energy resources that were promised and have yet to materialise, and the houses that will not be completed because the necessary water systems are not there. An infrastructure deficit is, more than anything else, what holds people back from living the best lives they can. I say it time and again that this is what makes Ireland a rich country that at the same time feels so poor. This is the Irish contradiction and the Irish dilemma: a rich country that feels so poor. We are very poor when it comes to the infrastructure that we have available. We are entitled to expect better in this rich country but we do not have it.

It has been encouraging in the last few months to see a Government that is finally engaging on this issue and getting serious about infrastructure. It is long overdue but the analysis of the problem and the solutions proposed in the accelerating infrastructure report did show a Government that is getting serious about tackling this problem. As the Minister will know, that

initiative was welcomed by the Labour Party. It would be easy for those of us in opposition to decry every Government report and every Government initiative and use the routine response that not enough is being done and so on. That initiative was evidence that there was a renewed interest in developing infrastructure and taking a new approach. As a party that cares about this country and is genuinely patriotic, we know that if this works and if the Government manages to deliver the housing, the health services, the critical infrastructure and the renewable energy we need, our country will do better and the Government will be judged on delivery.

That brings us to today's Bill. The idea proposed here is a simple one, that the Government should be able to point to a certain project and say, "This project is very important for all of our society", and therefore direct its various agencies and Departments to prioritise and work together to get a particular project over the line. On the face of it this simple idea seems like a sensible one. A citizen watching us today spending several hours debating this Bill might very well ask, "Well, why is this not happening already?". They would certainly be entitled to wonder whether it really requires primary legislation for the Government to be able to tell public bodies - the public bodies that are our accountable to this House and accountable to the Minister and funded by the taxpayer - to prioritise a certain project. What we have seen today is actually a failure of politics, a failure of leadership, a failure of governance and a failure of management. People will be entitled to ask if this is the answer to the problems and whether this is really the Government's solution to one of the most pressing challenges we face as a country by making a law to allow itself to ask or request public bodies to hurry up a bit. If this is the extent of the ambition on infrastructure we will see over the next three years, then many citizens are entitled to be worried. They might also ask whether, if this Bill had been passed five years ago or ten years ago, we would have an open and fully functioning national children's hospital by now. Would we be able to step outside Leinster House and get onto a metro to the airport, or would the systemic issues hampering and delaying these projects and so many others have remained in spite of this legislation?

I will turn now to a serious point that my colleague Deputy Sheehan will elaborate on later. Buried in this Bill are potentially significant constitutional issues that may arise, and in our view will arise, which risk leaving this legislation exposed to challenge. I am talking about section 7, which disapplies section 15 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act from designated projects and programmes, as the Minister outlined earlier. I looked very carefully at some of the countervailing measures and legislation in terms of publishing orders and bringing all those orders to the House, effectively putting them in the Oireachtas Library, and procedurally trying to make sure that the Minister follows a particular process to try, insofar as he can, to make this legislation bulletproof. I suspect, however, that it is not possible to do that in this legislation and I think there are flaws here. This is a step beyond simply instructing public bodies to prioritise and co-ordinate the fast-tracking of projects. It seems that what the Government is proposing here is to give the Executive the power to disapply the public body duty under the climate action Acts to perform public functions consistent with achieving the State's climate goals. Taken with the backsliding we have seen today, for example on the collection of carbon duties, this Government's commitment on climate action is very much in doubt.

We could see the State's biggest and most significant infrastructure projects being exempted from climate considerations altogether, despite what the Minister said in his remarks and his claims to the contrary with regard to other sections of the legislation. In effect, this legislation

would undermine the letter, spirit and tone of the 2015 Act itself. It is not clear to me where this proposal has come from. Maybe if pre-legislative scrutiny had not been waived, we could have got to the bottom of this. I can only conclude there was a fear that if pre-legislative scrutiny got under way, this aspect of the legislation would be exposed and brought to further public attention.

It is not a measure that was recommended in the Accelerating Infrastructure report. In fact, that report speaks glowingly of our commitment to climate targets, as it should. We should not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of thinking we can prioritise either climate action or infrastructure delivery. We can do both. I have been critical before of the way this Government is thinking about its infrastructure agenda. We are repeatedly seeing this type of binary thinking that pits climate against delivery and that should not be the case. I have said it in the House to the Minister and others that there appeared to be in the Accelerating Infrastructure report a fixation on judicial review and clouding of the picture. There was intense media interest in the judicial review aspects of the report as well. What seems to be proposed here is something that involves a risk that could deny citizens their rights to access justice under binding international agreements like the Aarhus Convention. That is something we need to be extremely mindful of.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Cuirim fáilte i bprionsabal roimh an mBille seo. Mar a dúirt an tAire, tá moill ollmhór againn sa tír seo maidir le cúrsaí bonneagair. Ceann de na fadhbanna is mó atá againn maidir leis an ngéarchéim tithíochta ná an ghéarchéim nó an mhoill leis an mbonneagar. Sa tír seo, tá fadhb mhór againn i gceithre réimse thábhachtacha: cúrsaí tithíochta, sláinte, iompair agus leictreachas. I welcome this Bill in principle and I would like us to work constructively on it. I am disappointed, as a member of the infrastructure committee, that a decision was taken to waive pre-legislative scrutiny on this. I would like a commitment from Government that the legislative guillotine will not be used for amendments on this legislation because this is really important. We have to get this right. The slow pace of infrastructure delivery is a huge barrier to the provision of housing in particular.

When it comes to legislating for critical infrastructure, I take a bit of a Victorian view on these things. I believe the Legislature should authorise major infrastructural development by statute, as was done in 1925 for Ardnacrusha. In relation to this Bill, I think there is an outsized reference to or emphasis on judicial review as the primary blockage or bottleneck, when the primary bottleneck for the delivery of infrastructure in this country is the planning system and the plethora of complicated planning and consenting processes that were not actually simplified by the 2024 Planning and Development Act. Sometimes it feels like the planning system in this country is a bit like a multi-stage obstacle course as opposed to a facilitator of national development. The Draghi report highlighted that we have some of the longest permitting processes in Europe for onshore wind projects for example. The thing identified as a key bottleneck for renewable energy was the long and complex permitting process. I see in the infrastructure Bill that public bodies will be required to do everything in their power to accelerate approval of projects designated as essential by the Government. I have no issue with that in principle. The issue I have is that we have not really had clarity in real terms as to what that will actually mean.

We know that our economy places significant pressure on water. We have a lot of water-intensive industries like pharmaceuticals and data centres in particular. I do not want to see a

situation where fossil fuel infrastructure or data centres could potentially be designated as critical infrastructure. While I welcome the intention of the Bill to deal with fragmented decision-making and the imposition of binding duties on public bodies to prioritise, co-ordinate and resource critical projects I have significant concerns about the disapplication of section 15 of the 2015 climate Act. Judicial reviews for climate have a high degree of success because of real procedural flaws by regulatory bodies in complying with their climate obligations. It brings me back to the 2020 Supreme Court judgment, which deemed that the 2017 national mitigation plan for climate was quashed for being too vague.

The decision to bypass pre-legislative scrutiny for this really undermines our ability as legislators to ensure it is legally sound and robust. I would like the Minister to address how this Bill intersects with our obligations under Aarhus. It seems to me from a lot of the media commentary and utterances from Government that it is excessively focused on judicial review and limiting public participation and legal challenges, as if they are the main or only cause of the failure to deliver infrastructure in this country. The fact is that we have the slowest regulatory and planning processes in the European Union. That is not a new problem. That is the Government's problem. It is a direct consequence of this Government's more than ten years in power. Six years have passed since Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael effectively consummated their marriage. In that time, we have had budget overruns and delays. We have had a national development plan that was published without listing the projects, yet the Bill itself talks about listing critical infrastructure projects.

As a member of the infrastructure committee, we have met with countless witnesses over the past 11 months, and they have all said the same thing. There is a need for multi-annual funding, the need to give way to the common good, the need to speed up decision-making and there is a shortage of properly trained construction workers.

Deputy George Lawlor: We know that the explanatory note for this Bill says that its purpose is to allow Government to designate specific infrastructure projects or programmes that it considers to be critical. The Bill does not reference specific projects or programmes. It provides Government with the power to designate projects or programmes as critical infrastructure. Section 3 provides the Government the statutory powers to designate a project as a critical infrastructure project or programme, done in this case by Deputy Chambers as the Minister for public expenditure.

In practice, it represents a major shift towards speed and centralised co-ordination in infrastructure delivery. However, there are major concerns with this Bill given the history of infrastructure and the parochial nature of politics in this country. There are many concerns in terms of the reduction in transparency. We have seen pre-legislative scrutiny waived and a limitation on public participation. Overburdening of agencies is another issue. We have seen that MARA is totally overrun given the amount of regulatory work to be done there.

It creates opportunities for political influence over project prioritisation. We as a nation have seen the damage political influence has caused when it comes to major infrastructural projects. In my constituency a number of critical pieces of infrastructure simply need to be fast-tracked, which have been neglected over the years. These included the Oilgate to Rosslare motorway, which is the final piece of the jigsaw from Larne to Rosslare Harbour. Rosslare Europort has seen an increase of 350% in freight traffic since Brexit. Families have been left waiting almost

two decades for movement and development on this. Their land has been sterilised and stigmatised. I have dealt with families who for the want of 2 yards to maybe build a home on their land have been told it is part of the overall project for the motorway, and I have dealt with people whose homes and businesses have been left. Despite this, these critical pieces of infrastructure have been delayed and delayed.

We see the offshore renewable energy potential off the coast of Rosslare. It is critical if we are to meet our 2030 commitments. This week we have seen that if we are to break our dependence on fossil fuels, we need offshore renewable energy as part of critical infrastructure.

There is also the area of education and my colleague from Waterford spoke about the South East Technological University. We need the development of the Wexford campus as part of that. The money was made available in 2015 to purchase the site and it was only concluded in the past six months. Wexford is one of the largest counties in Leinster. It is bigger than Waterford or Carlow in population terms but it is left behind. In principle, this Bill is excellent but it leaves the door open to parochial politics whereby certain Ministers can pick certain projects and leave the rest behind.

Deputy Sean Fleming: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Bill. As Chairman of the Joint Committee on Infrastructure and National Development Plan Delivery, I welcome this particular discussion and look forward to this legislation going to the committee. As Chairman, I will ensure we have a thorough, effective and detailed discussion on Committee Stage. We will have ample time for any issues that need to be raised, discussed or teased out at the committee where we can get into the specifics of the legislation.

I welcome and support this important Bill that creates a new fast track approval process for critical infrastructure. Under this new legislation, every public body will be required to do everything within its power to accelerate approval of any designated project to the maximum extent possible. Public bodies will also be required to co-operate with each other. That is going to be a new process for many organisations but that is essentially how the Bill will operate. They will be able to co-ordinate, prioritise and sequence their duties with other public bodies and allocate any administrative, technical or decision-making resources necessary for a rapid approval of a project or programme. The Bill specifically identifies critical infrastructure in the energy, transport and water sectors as a priority. This infrastructure is necessary to underpin all other development in the State from housing, which is the most important infrastructure we need, to other economic and social investments.

A recent Government circular established a mandatory cross-government process for the rapid reporting of court decisions that may affect the delivery of critical national infrastructure. This ensures early identification of judicial decisions that could influence how future infrastructure projects are planned or assessed and delivered. That is important because not every Government agency watches what every other agency is doing and there could be a court decision that could be relevant across the board and it is important we have a centralised area to keep a close eye on and have the information on these matters.

The Government will designate individual projects or programmes as critical infrastructure by order to be laid before Dáil Éireann, meaning every specific project will have to be laid before this House and if a resolution annulling the order is passed within the next 21 sitting days, the order shall be annulled. There will, therefore, be an opportunity for these to be

debated in the House. I stress this is about national infrastructure to help in the three areas I have mentioned. We cannot get into fixing every pothole using this legislation. That is not the intention. Everybody in the House, including me, could draw up a list of two dozen critical pieces of infrastructure that are required in our counties but if this legislation is to be effective, we cannot swamp these public bodies with 50, 60, 70, 80 or 100 critical projects because which of them would the public bodies prioritise? The essence of successfully implementing legislation will be to strategically concentrate on key projects that will help delivery of housing and other infrastructure such as water services that have been mentioned. If we are focused on what we do, we can get a lot done but it is important we do not overstretch all the public bodies beyond their ability to deliver these projects.

It is also important that we simplify and streamline the regulatory and consenting process. Many Deputies have mentioned this and they must work together collectively. For example, in a recent report I read, there was reference to several consenting bodies and regulatory bodies, and they have to work together in co-operation rather than in individual silos. The ones in that report were the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, Environmental Protection Agency, Maritime Area Regulatory Authority, An Coimisiún Pleanála and National Parks and Wildlife Service. Every one of those has a specific role to fulfil backed up by legislation, but part of what is behind this is to make them sit down together on projects that can affect those various agencies, not for each one of them to do it in sequence so that in five years we have reached the end of an approval or consenting basis. That is important.

Through our engagement with the business community, I understand many people are furious at the delays and the time major capital projects take. Many people cannot build a home because of the lack of infrastructure. Motorists are stuck in traffic jams for hours when they need to get to work on time or get children to school and we need the infrastructure for all these areas that are very important for the delivery of these services. The accelerating infrastructure task force report found successive reforms over many years have significantly increased the complexity of modern infrastructure delivery. Every time we set up a new agency, it is an independent body that is only responsible to itself and its board or its line Department. It is important we have co-ordination between these bodies on an ongoing basis. In the coming months and years, Ministers will be watching all these and it is important that there will be ongoing reporting by the Minister for public expenditure to ensure they are all delivering as they are required to by the Government. That will be as a result of matters laid before this Dáil. The Government is not going to do this behind the public's back. We have various frameworks in place for consenting agencies, all of which have a value. They would not be there otherwise but we need to ensure complex and overlapping consents do not prohibit essential works being undertaken. The recent infrastructure action plan covers a lot of legal reform and regulatory simplification and I acknowledge the Minister's work in bringing that in. The House and its Members love to complicate things when they get into detail but sometimes there can be a simple approach. We have over-complicated our lives.

10 o'clock

Every one of us knows that at local level, not to mind here at national level. We want to have co-ordination between all of these bodies. This action plan will lead to regulatory simplification, acknowledging the laws and the environmental laws that are there. Every time we delay a project, time is money. A delayed project costs more money. Whose money is it?

It is the taxpayers' money. It is not in the interests of this House or the people who elected us to this House to delay things unnecessarily. It is important we look after the taxpayers' money wisely in all of these areas.

This issue of judicial reviews has been mentioned. The number of such reviews has increased substantially in recent years. We are all familiar with that. Wind farms and renewable energy have been mentioned. We have been all been at meetings where objectors, who have the right to object, say that their approach will be to object at local authority level and to An Bord Pleanála, and then, regardless of what happens there, to go for a judicial review and go to the High Court. They hope that this will take seven or eight years and the developers will have gone away by then. Most of us, if we are honest, will say that we have attended meetings where people have said openly and publicly, before a single plan has been put on the table, that they will delay it for seven or eight years and then they will go away. That is no way to run the country. What has been proposed here is proportionate and reasonable in the circumstances.

I am very pleased that the National Development Finance Agency, NDFA, will have a key role in providing advice to various Government bodies, rather than each Government body when it has a project having to go away and get its own consultants to do it. There will be a repository of information available to the NDFA, which is appearing before the committee I will chair tomorrow as part of this ongoing work. We have a specific Oireachtas committee dealing with infrastructure, which we have never had before, so there is an opportunity there. Any Member of this House or the Seanad is welcome to attend any of our meetings, which happen every week. We have had a series of meetings with agencies such as Uisce Éireann and Bord Gáis. All of the organisations mentioned today have appeared and given their views to our committee over the past several months. That will continue so there is an ample forum in this House to grill any one of those organisations. I encourage people who are of a mind to do so, and have the time to do so, to come to tomorrow's meeting with the NDFA, which will have a key input to make to this entire process. It will be more efficient to have a centralised repository of skills in an area rather than every Department having to go it alone.

I expect that the Committee Stage debate next week will be thorough, detailed and very effective. I look forward to it. There have been legitimate comments that we did not have pre-legislative scrutiny on this Bill. It has already been said by people in this House that it is a very short, simple Bill. That has already been said by Members of the Opposition during the past hour, and I agree with it. As Chairman of the committee, it is my honest belief that if we had done pre-legislative scrutiny, we would be inviting people in to listen to them from now until the recess in June or July; we would come back next September or October for a draft report; we might have a final report by next October; and all of this could delay the critical infrastructure legislation by six months. I believe this legislation is important. We need to get on with it, with proper Oireachtas scrutiny, but we do not need to delay it unnecessarily. As has been said here, we can quote all the delays we like all over the country and we can refer to everybody who causes those delays. If the Oireachtas started its work on this legislation by delaying its implementation by six months, it would not send a good signal. We are better to do our detailed work as we would normally do on Committee Stage. Every organisation that could have been expected to come in as part of pre-legislative scrutiny has already appeared, or will be appearing, before our committee in the normal course of events in the weeks and months ahead. I am satisfied that the legislation, when it is passed, will be effective. All I will

say to the Government is that when the legislation is completed I ask the Minister, Deputy Chambers, to monitor progress on a monthly basis to make sure he is satisfied all the targets are being delivered on.

Deputy Pa Daly: Under the helm of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, critical deficits have opened across almost all sectors from transport to housing, water, energy infrastructure, healthcare and our digital systems. Successive Governments have allowed dangerous gaps to open between the Ireland this Government claims we are and our critical infrastructure that we just cannot rely on. Under Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the remaining Independents who support them, critical deficits are far from being the exception. They are visible, they are the norm and, increasingly, they are putting ordinary people and their health at risk. Successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments have produced critical infrastructure, much of it designed and constructed decades ago, that has totally failed to keep pace with Ireland's growth and has, to date, squandered most of its potential. The reality is that we are asking systems that were built for a smaller, slower, less complex Ireland to carry too heavy a load. Those systems are already buckling under the pressure and they are starting to fail.

I will take transport as an example. Congestion is not a rush-hour issue; it is the result of structural failures of this Government, no matter what part of the transport network you examine. Roads are in a state of disrepair. They are over capacity and not safe. Rail networks are operating at the absolute limits of what ageing signalling and rolling stock can handle. Commuters are regularly packed like sardines on platforms as they wait for overcrowded trains that cannot be relied on to turn up on time. Public transport projects, where they exist, have often been delivered late and over budget, or else scaled back to get them across the line. For many parts of rural Ireland, public transport is totally non-existent. The result is lost time, lost productivity and a daily tax on people's lives, especially those who have no alternative but to commute for long distances because housing is unaffordable near to where the jobs are.

This brings me to housing, which in itself is a form of critical infrastructure. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have treated housing as a market problem for far too long, rather than as the right it should be. The fundamental difference between the attitude of the Government and our attitude to housing is that the Government feels it must incentivise large developers to have very expensive, for-rent apartments on the quays in Dublin whereas we believe more social and affordable housing is required. What we need, and what people need, is a home they can call their own. It is quite simple.

When people cannot live near schools, work or transport, every other system is strained: water networks, roads and emergency services all absorb the cost of that failure. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the electricity grid or in water and wastewater infrastructure. Capacity on the electricity grid has been gobbled up by data centres, leading to a ticking time bomb. Our ageing pipes leak vast quantities of treated water every day. They are operating far beyond capacity. All around County Kerry, villages like Castlegregory, Fenit, Duagh and Ballyduff - I could go on - have, in effect, what is called an Imhoff tank, which is basically a hole in the ground that has probably been there for 60 years. In all of these villages, you cannot now have infrastructure or housing built because of the age of this infrastructure, if you could call it that. Development cannot take place and communities cannot grow. In an era where one-off housing in rural areas, particularly under significant urban influence, is more difficult

than ever to achieve, people cannot move into towns and villages and they cannot develop because the necessary investment in the infrastructure has not been made by this Government.

I am running out of time. If we do not get this right, things could deteriorate even further and that is something Ireland cannot afford.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: I want to respond to a couple of points made by Deputy Fleming. Alarm bells ring for me when the explanation for why we cannot do pre-legislative scrutiny is because we cannot do it efficiently and it might take us six months, when we are talking about a Bill that aims to make processes efficient. I did pre-legislative scrutiny in the previous Dáil when it needed to be done quickly on the housing committee and it was done in a matter of a couple of weeks. We were able to do it quickly and efficiently. The Government is saying to us that we will have an efficient process around critical infrastructure but we cannot even manage the pre-legislative scrutiny efficiently. It does not really speak to confidence in the Government's ability. I do not buy that, to be frank.

Deputy Fleming said that the designations the Minister makes will be laid before the House and there will be an opportunity to debate them in the House. That is technically correct but it is a bit of stretch because to be able to debate in the House, we have 21 days to get a motion in. Most Opposition parties and groups may not have any Private Members' time in those 21 days and if we did, as the Minister knows well, we have hundreds of competing strong demands for that one time slot. To get a slot to actually debate any of these designations in the Dáil, while technically possible, will be extremely difficult to exercise.

Before I get into the detail of the Bill, I will make a point about critical infrastructure. It is not just about process being more efficient. While that is important, it is also about the overall strategic priorities of the Government. The Government's overall strategic priorities when it comes to critical infrastructure have been wrong. Tá na tosaíochtaí míchearta ag an Rialtas. I will give an example. If you fly into any airport, you get a good sense of the priorities in that country or city. If you fly into Vienna, you see a lot of affordable housing. If you fly into London at night-time, you see a lot of lights around all-weather sports facilities they have invested in. If you fly into places in Spain, you see all the wind farms which mean they have cheaper electricity bills and are not as impacted by the energy crisis now as other European countries. If you fly into Dublin Airport, what you see? If you are coming up from Wicklow into Meath, Kildare and west Dublin, what really strikes you as the things that have been developed in the past ten years or so? What has been the priority of the country? You will not see it in other countries; it is data centres. The Government in its addiction to over-provision of data centres has shown where its priorities lie. That has resulted in higher energy prices for people and small businesses and in part in the crisis we are in at the moment. A more efficient process in terms of legislation is important but the priorities of the Government are important as well. Not only was there no pre-legislative scrutiny of this Bill, there was no regulatory impact assessment. Why would you want to bother with a regulatory impact assessment for a Bill like this on critical infrastructure that is all about regulation and regulatory processes? The Government just does not bother to do one. Pre-legislative scrutiny was brought in as a reform after the crash to make this Oireachtas much better at doing its job because there was a recognition across the Dáil and the Oireachtas that we needed to do our job as legislators better yet here we go - we will not bother doing it. Either you will not bother doing it or you do not want the assessment to be done.

Overall, we strongly support the intention of the Bill. It is very important that we deliver critical infrastructure as efficiently and effectively as possible. We absolutely agree with that intention. For housing, healthcare, education, the climate infrastructure we need, public transport and reducing the cost of living and of doing business, it is important that critical infrastructure is delivered efficiently. However, what rings more alarm bells for me is the section to exempt public bodies from climate laws. There has been no scrutiny of this so far. It really says something stark about the Government's approach in terms of climate action. Why is it that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in the previous Dáil were all for this but now they are no longer in government with the Green Party, they think they can ditch these provisions? It shows a real lack of ongoing commitment to climate action.

I found the Minister's comments quite extraordinary in his opening remarks. I am paraphrasing but my read of what the Minister said was to not worry because the Government will be doing the climate stuff anyway. He did not get into the point that it will not be required by law and if the Government does not do it or make serious mistakes, there will be no recourse to the courts or justice system. When the Minister gave a rationale for that exemption, he said it is because the Government does not agree with the motivations, beliefs and ideology of some of the people taking challenges in the courts. He stated "It is abundantly clear that some of these reviews are being taken for ideological reasons". That is quite an extraordinary comment for the Minister to make and I would like to know the basis for that. Who decides what is an ideological judicial review and what is not? Obviously the Minister has decided. I think there is an over-provision and over-concentration of data centres in this country but I would not say that if people engaged in data centre lobbying or businesses wanted to have access to justice, they should be denied it because of their ideological position. I would not say that about anyone. Who decides what is an ideological position that is acceptable or not? The Minister has decided that some of the people taking court cases have ideological positions and therefore should not have these provisions in law. That is quite an extraordinary approach to take. Access to justice is a fundamental part of our process. Independent judicial arbitration and who has access to it should not be decided on by the Minister withdrawing these rights because he thinks some people have ideologies. That is very arbitrary. Judicial activism has been given a bad rap by this Government. As for a lot of the rights we enjoy, such as workers' rights, equal pay for women, equality for the LGBT community, disabled people, the environment and the clean air we breathe, some came from civil society campaigning over the years. Some came from the Oireachtas but some were driven by judicial activism. We live in a better country and a better world because of it and we should not try to write that out of our history.

In this legislation there is a lack of transparent process around designation of what is or is not critical infrastructure. This is an issue with the Bill. I am a fan of quite simple legislation. It does not always have to be incredibly long and complex. That does not necessarily serve us well but some of the key challenges in this legislation seem to have been sidestepped by the Government. It is as if it does not know how it will define them or lay out the criteria strongly or clearly or have transparency around the decision-making process and so just will not cover them in the Bill at all. I am not asking for a complex process but there are no provisions or safeguards in the Bill, for example, to stop a Minister prioritising projects that would benefit their own constituency over other projects that serve the national interest. It is critically important that legislation holds water no matter who is in government or what sort of a Minister we have. We have had decades of Ministers favouring projects in their constituencies - not all

Ministers but we have had decades of it. This Bill does not give any safeguards and there is no real transparency around designation. Laying it before the Oireachtas does not give proper democratic insight or input. The lack of safeguards needs to be addressed. We have not had any analysis from the Minister, and of course we did not have pre-legislative scrutiny, on why previous critical infrastructure legislation has not worked so there is a lack of potential learning. It was promised, for example, that the strategic housing development legislation would fast-track housing; it did the opposite. It created delays. The Bill fails to address many acute challenges and fundamental problems such as the need to build up State capacity. Of course it is not all about the legislative process but outsourcing so many functions to the private sector has reduced State capacity and has been costly and inefficient. Alongside this Bill, it is important that much stronger capacity is developed in really good community engagement. If there is efficient legislation and good community engagement, we could do much better in delivering the critical infrastructure we desperately need. We will table amendments. I hope the Minister considers them constructively.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: I am extremely concerned by what the Minister and this Government are doing in the area of climate action and now in the area of climate law. They are dismantling years of work and future generations will bear the cost. Section 7 of the Critical Infrastructure Bill provides for a disapplication of section 15 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 in specific cases. Simply put, this means now that large infrastructure projects carried out in transport, energy, water and wastewater will no longer have to comply with section 15 of the climate Act.

This is an incredible thing to put into legislation. Section 15 places an obligation on public bodies to prioritise climate concerns while carrying out their functions, so the Critical Infrastructure Bill will exempt transport infrastructure, energy systems and water and wastewater projects from climate obligations. It will disapply climate law from some of the biggest potential sources of long-term emissions and the most emission-intensive projects that are carried out by the State.

The climate Act was introduced because there is an acceptance that Government decisions have consistently failed to deliver emissions reductions without legal obligations. We all remember how difficult it was, the amount of work that went into it in the last Dáil and the amount of consultation involved in bringing together the climate Act. Now, with the stroke of a pen, the Minister is going to disapply it for large-scale projects. What the Minister is doing is saying these climate considerations are no longer an option and he will override them when they no longer fit the Government's agenda. What the Minister is doing with section 7 is gutting the core purpose of the climate Act. While every day public bodies will be expected to cut emissions and meet their climate objectives, as they should and as is intended in the climate Act and was the intention of the then Government and every Deputy who voted for that Act in the previous Dáil, huge infrastructure projects will now be given a free pass.

This is not about paperwork or simplifying procedures. Transport infrastructure, energy systems and water and wastewater projects all shape our emissions for decades. They lock in carbon pathways long after Governments move on. How can the Minister propose setting aside climate laws for these projects? We cannot have a climate Act that is optional for big projects. That just will not work. Climate change will not stop because big projects must advance. What comes next? If this Bill becomes law, what is to stop the Government exempting housing

projects, agriculture infrastructure or industrial policy from climate law in future? If the Minister creates a precedent for climate law to be disapplied for strategic reasons, the integrity of the whole Act is undermined.

To make matters worse, the Bill is being progressed without pre-legislative scrutiny by the infrastructure committee. This is a slap in the face to Members of the Oireachtas and a serious undermining of parliamentary processes. The Government is constantly talking about future proofing and climate resilience. The Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, is constantly talking about how climate change is an existential crisis we are facing, yet day in, day out the Government is acting completely contrary to this. It is sidelining climate action and hollowing out our climate law. This will be felt for generations to come. Ireland will fall further behind in its climate obligations and the public will pay the economic and environmental price.

Deputy Rory Hearn: I have been researching and critically analysing Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael's infrastructure policy for almost 20 years. In fact, I did my PhD on it, specifically on infrastructure and how it was developed during the Celtic tiger period. Back then, 20 years ago, the key policy of Fianna Fáil was to have public-private partnerships deliver infrastructure through new ways which were, essentially, handing our public infrastructure over to big global infrastructure providers that saw infrastructure as a commodity through those public-private partnerships in wastewater, social housing and transport. It utterly failed and we then had a decade of austerity, during which the Government failed again and cut back capital projects. In this new Bill there is no step change away from this outsourcing and the overreliance on the private model of delivery of infrastructure. Why are we in the situation we are with the children's hospital? Why are we in the situation we are with the lack of infrastructure? It is in large part because the State has handed over the delivery of infrastructure to the private sector. We have local authorities and we can go through our State agencies.

The Bill is incredible to me, and in reading through it and the explanatory memorandum I wonder whether the Minister is having a laugh. He is saying that what this is about is getting public bodies to prioritise critical infrastructure, and the other part is about getting public bodies to co-operate and co-ordinate with each other. For crying out loud, Fine Gael has been in government for 15 years, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have been in government together for six years, and this is what the Minister has, a Bill to get public bodies to prioritise critical infrastructure. Why are they not doing that already? Why does the Government not have public bodies doing this? I believe this is a smokescreen. It is a fig leaf to put across the idea that it is doing something. It is not going to fundamentally change how infrastructure is delivered in this country. It is going to be the same model of reliance on the private sector, the same model of reliance on outsourcing and the same chronic underfunding of infrastructure.

A message came from my constituency office today about creches, with regard to parents trying to find creches in the constituency but not being able to do so. Where is the increase in funding for crèches in this? The Luas to Finglas is a transport project in my constituency. It is delayed and not due to be delivered by 2030. This is not because of a lack of prioritisation by public bodies; it is because of a lack of funding allocated to the project. The Minister should be honest. This is not a step change in how we are going to see critical infrastructure delivered in this country. As I said, to a certain extent the Bill appears to be a smokescreen to allow the Government to pretend it is doing something. Nothing has fundamentally changed, however. If we want to deliver critical infrastructure, particularly housing, rapidly, why do we not set up

a State construction company with the capacity to directly deliver, rather than relying year after year on a private sector that is failing to deliver, that is not being prioritised and that is taking the State for a ride in terms of value for money?

Deputy Eoin Hayes: It should be lost on no one, today of all days, that climate change and the associated issues in energy security, water infrastructure and transportation infrastructure are of paramount importance for the future of our country. I welcome the Government focusing on the acceleration of the delivery of such infrastructure so we can meet this climate century and navigate it more securely for the shared prosperity of our people. However, the Bill may enable travel in the opposite direction. I thank in particular the Oireachtas Library and Research Service for the comprehensive Bill digest, through which I was able to scrutinise the legislation and specifically section 7 of the Bill, which allows for the provisions of section 15 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 to be disapplied. As the Bill digest states, contrary to the Minister's opening remarks, this in effect would mean exempting critical infrastructure projects from being consistent with the most recent climate action plans and strategies, adaptation frameworks and plans, and national climate objectives, including mitigating greenhouse gas emissions.

It is notable that the infrastructure in the Bill is circumscribed to energy, water and transport but it further defines infrastructure as any that enables essential facilities and systems of the State to function effectively and is not limited to these areas. Combined with the powers of section 3 to entrust the Government with designated orders, this definition effectively allows the Government, or any future Government, to designate any project or programme as a critical infrastructure project, public or private. Additionally, should the fast-track, one-stage planning process in the Planning and Development Act 2024 not yet executed be executed, we may be in the extraordinary situation where this Bill effectively allows the Government to unilaterally designate any piece of infrastructure, private or public, in the State as a critical infrastructure project to be fast-tracked beyond all normal processes, entirely exempt from climate requirements, with virtually no oversight or recourse by the Oireachtas or anyone else. This seems problematic. I will even go so far as to say it may be constitutionally suspect and may be challenged in the courts. In practical terms, this would mean the Government could fast-track a data centre, an industrial farm or an oil rig. Could the Bill perhaps be used to override all normal processes for the proposed LNG terminal in Kerry? If that is the case, it is deeply concerning. I hope the Minister, the Department, the committee on Committee Stage and others consider the balance of climate action carefully before proceeding with the Bill.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I begin by acknowledging the events of the past week. A lot of people have been in contact with me and my office and I acknowledge their concern. People are understandably worried. The ongoing war in Iran is having real and serious consequences for households and businesses across the country and the pressures of energy costs, fuel costs and supply chains are being felt everywhere. It would be wrong to pretend otherwise. I welcome the Government's €750 million support package approved by Dáil Éireann today.

For context, it is one of the most significant responses in Europe and more than ten times the level of support being provided by the Northern Ireland Executive, for example. The package is a meaningful intervention that will help shield families and businesses from the worst of

what is coming. However, we have to be honest. The months ahead will be difficult and challenging. There are no easy solutions to a crisis of this scale, and people deserve straight talk rather than false reassurance.

I also want to say something about the protests we have seen. The right to protest is fundamental, and I respect it absolutely. I thank the gardaí who had to operate in challenging environments trying to balance legitimate protest with the need to ensure critical supplies continued to move. I also thank our front-line workers, the retail workers, transport workers and many others who quietly kept things going over the past week. Their contribution should not go unnoticed.

Clearly, we all want to see this war end. Every day it continues brings more suffering in the region and here at home. If this crisis has underlined anything, it is how exposed we remain as a country when critical infrastructure is not in place at the scale we need it. That is why this Bill matters and that is why I support it. The case for accelerating offshore wind development has never been stronger. We need to move quickly and with urgency. I am on record in this House as saying I felt that the previous Minister with responsibility for energy did not treat energy security or, indeed, expanding public transport with the urgency it required. This is an opportunity to correct that. We need to be ambitious. There is an undeniable case for enhanced supports for solar, which needs to be deployed quickly and deliver real resilience at household and community level. We also need to have a serious national conversation about what happens post-Corrib gas, for example. When Corrib runs out, possibly next year, we are simply going to become completely dependent on imported gas with no domestic alternative whatsoever. That is not a credible energy policy. We need energy security and certainty and we need a robust plan. Legislation alone will not get us through this. What will, though, is willingness across the House and across the country to face hard choices honestly together. This Bill is a step in that right direction.

Deputy John Clendennen: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important Bill as a member of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Infrastructure and National Development Plan Delivery. I welcome some of the initiatives the Minister has taken such as the introduction of an accelerating infrastructure task force and the work it is doing to try to ensure we highlight this at every single level. It is important we hold every public body to account on this and that there is co-operation. It is a major cultural shift, however, and I hope we can achieve that cultural shift because, in many ways, culture is intangible. It is immeasurable until we see delivery. Unfortunately and regrettably, in this country today, when we talk about infrastructure delivery, we talk about decades rather than years. That is simply unacceptable. I see it across the board in my constituency, whether it is a library in Edenderry, a hospice in Tullamore or a primary care centre in Birr. We really need to change that attitude. We see today the need we have to think differently and innovatively with the likes of modern methods of construction and abnormal loads. We have a conflict where local authorities are preventing abnormal loads and not building plans for roads to specification to accommodate them. That is something that has to be addressed with urgency.

Other speakers mentioned and referenced energy. We saw what happened at the weekend. I understand the pain and difficulty and the challenges many have with the cost of living today. It is a real highlight and alarm for us that we now need to treat energy as critical infrastructure. In terms of its importance, the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, has done exceptional work in this

area, but we really need to apply urgency from all of government in this area. We have been to the fore on renewable energy in my county and we have delivered. We generated more energy in January alone than any other county. However, we cannot take it for granted that there will be continuous buy-in from communities in this area. Community benefit funds must be modified in order that they can leave a lasting legacy and are not just investing in the likes of jerseys and scoreboards in local sporting clubs. If that is not sorted out and clarified and wind energy guidelines provided, we are going to lose the people on this one. That is my concern. I ask the Minister and Government to prioritise this in relation to guidelines.

On private energy investment, the feedback I receive from the regulators with oversight of energy in the country is that they are not working with private investors. They are not coming to the table and collaborating with them. We need to move away from this culture of what people cannot do to advising private investors and private developers of what they can do. If that does not happen, we are going to continue to see decades for a window of development.

On the grid update, what we are doing with buildings that are put aside for PR 6 is very important. However, maybe separately, Deputy Devlin mentioned our reliance on gas internationally. We are essentially relying on international nuclear power from other states. In reality, we need to start that discussion now because every day that we can move away from a dependence on fossil fuels and develop our renewable infrastructure will reduce our dependence on it and have an impact on price.

One area that has become an absolute minefield and disaster in terms of development is the use of climate compliance as an effective tool to hamper progress. Far too often, whether it is on a local authority level or in the judicial courts, we hear about snails, mussels and bats and how important they are. I have no issue with any of those, but when it floods a town or delays development from an economic perspective or delivery of an industrial site, housing development or water infrastructure, it is simply not acceptable. We really need to find a way of overcoming these challenges so that we can get on with very serious development. If that does not happen, we are still going to be here in a number of years talking about decades rather than years. This is very important legislation and I welcome it. We have to keep the momentum going and delivering this much-needed infrastructure when we have the funding and finances to work on it. I welcome and I fully support it.

Deputy Emer Currie: I was elected for the first time in 2019 as a councillor in Dublin West in the election after the Minister. In preparation for tonight, I looked back over some of my leaflets on transport and infrastructure from that year. One referenced €1.5 billion that was ring-fenced for BusConnects that would cut journey times by 40%. Another referenced a €2 billion investment in rail to electrify and upgrade the Maynooth line to a DART service in line with the national priority to double frequency and triple capacity by 2027. Both highlighted Project Ireland 2040 and the national development plan of 2018 and how the funding had been secured and they were major infrastructural wins at the time. I talked about having the vision, the plan and the budget to finally deliver an integrated transport system for Dublin West, and it was right. The Government did have the vision, the plan and the budget. However, what my leaflet and the Government of the day both failed to appreciate were the barriers and blockages that would then emerge. BusConnects has been stuck in a legal challenge since 2024. DART+ West got planning in 2024 but two judicial reviews delayed progress. They have since been reviewed and work is to begin in late 2026-2027.

Seven years on from my first political leaflet, therefore, our major transport projects have not been delivered. I am frustrated, commuters are frustrated and communities are frustrated. I know the Minister, too, is frustrated. The only acceptable response to frustration is meaningful action. That infrastructural deficit is not due to money and it is not due to a lack of strategic planning but to slow and unreliable delivery systems. We have to act to remove the systemic blockages delaying infrastructure delivery across housing, energy utilities and transport. We have to act to tackle delays due to slow and unpredictable legal and planning frameworks. We have to speed things up. We have to meet the needs of the nation from building homes to hospitals and rail lines to power lines. We have to secure Ireland's competitiveness by addressing Ireland's infrastructural deficits. These are national imperatives. For every Member of this House, they are also local imperatives.

Last year, over 1,300 new homes were delivered in Dublin West, but too many residents are left waiting on infrastructure. I want BusConnects delivered. Journey times in Dublin West will only reduce if speed increases for the buses. That will only happen with the construction of a core bus corridor. Right now, it can take up to two and a half hours on the 39A for a student who lives in Ongar to get to UCD. The number 38 bus departing the city at peak times travels an average of 12.5 km/h. A professional walker might match or even beat many of our primary commuter routes. I want DART+ West delivered and more capacity in the meantime. I want 2,500 homes in the new area of Dunsink, Dublin 15, delivered by 2029. It is not under the category of critical infrastructure, but I want the Royal Canal greenway delivered. It also featured in my 2019 leaflet and has been submitted to An Coimisiún Pleanála this year. I also want to see an astro pitch in Martin Savage Park.

Going forward, I want to see projects such as a new train station at Porterstown to support the new area of Kellystown, beside Clonsilla, which was also in my 2019 leaflet. I also want the proposed Blanchardstown and Tyrrelstown Luas lines envisaged under Luas 2050, the Glasnevin MetroLink station connecting DART+ West to the wider network and the expansion of grid capacity supporting businesses in the Dublin enterprise zone. All of this depends on our ability to deliver infrastructure at pace and at scale. That is why I support this Bill.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: It is as clear as day to me and my constituents that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael cannot be trusted to deliver critical infrastructure across this country. I listened to the Taoiseach last week when he spoke about the protestors putting our clean water supply at risk. He said that could not be tolerated and was against the law. I have never heard the Taoiseach speak so resolutely about the thousands of people in Kilkenny and Carlow, in places such as Castlecomer, who have gone years without clean water. How many more years must these families endure dirty water flowing through their taps every day? Those taxpayers are being treated like second-class citizens.

Deputy Fleming spoke about people kicking the can down the road and delaying wind farms. The same could be said of the Government with the wind farm regulations. This Government refuses to bring out wind farm regulations at any speed, while areas are being hampered. In 2025, approximately 13% of the country's wind-generated electricity was wasted because the grid was not strong enough to carry all the power being produced. Over €1 million per day is paid back in curtailment payments. The amount of wasted renewable energy in the 13 months leading up to 31 January 2026 was estimated at a retail value of €559 million. The Government is putting the cart before the horse while communities suffer. Some €1 million or

more is wasted per day. How has the Government let this happen? It is no wonder that we are paying among the highest electricity prices.

All we see with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael is short-sightedness, no ambition and little to no accountability. As a result, our housing, health, water and transport are all suffering because critical infrastructure projects, vital projects for our economy and the quality of life of people across Ireland are moving at a snail's pace.

Deputy Réada Cronin: We have a chronic lack of infrastructure in our country. The basics, such as housing, transport, school places, hospitals, grid capacity and an effective high-quality water supply, are all completely lacking in the second richest country in all of Europe. Where does the money go? It is the people's money, the tax that people pay for their work, the solidarity contributions they make to their fellow citizens in the running of the State.

A graphic made by Sinéad O'Sullivan went viral over the weekend. It showed Ireland's massive wealth relative to our lack of delivery and infrastructure at a European level. Unfortunately, we are in a league of our own. We are the red dot on the chart, out on our own and well below both poorer and wealthier countries.

Ireland is by far one of the richest countries in the EU, yet our infrastructure delivery is worse than that of Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary, all of which are poorer on the GNI metric. All we see is the Government clapping itself on the back about fiscal prudence and running a budgetary surplus, year on year. People keep hearing from the Government benches that we are a rich country, but no one feels it. They see a country crippled by a housing crisis exacerbated by a basic lack of infrastructure. That is why I welcome measures that will speed up delivery, but experience tells me I should be very doubtful about it. The record of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael on critical infrastructure delivery is categorised by inaction, delays and bad value for people's money. The shining example is the children's hospital, which has been delayed 18 times and counting. The DART+ West project will run to Kilcock in my constituency, and not to Maynooth, as I like to remind people. I am on the infrastructural committee. I wanted pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill. We were prepared to meet often and to meet over the holidays to do it quickly. As the chair of the committee, an Teachta Fleming, said, we have had the experts in. They tell us that it is not because of judicial reviews or environmental reasons that we are not getting infrastructure. It is the result of the Government's lack of action.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Section 7 of this Bill represents a fundamental attack on the provisions of the climate action Act passed in this House in 2021 with the support of 129 Members from the Green Party, the Labour Party, the Social Democrats, People Before Profit, Sinn Féin and, crucially, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Now, five years later, this Critical Infrastructure Bill means that any project that is designated as critical infrastructure will no longer have its climate impact examined. Today, the Government is seeking to repeal, by the back door, a central aspect of the climate action Act.

Let me set out how the Critical Infrastructure Bill does this. Section 15 of the climate action Act 2021 puts a legal duty on public bodies to perform their actions in a manner that is consistent with the climate Act. It places a climate duty on all public bodies, including the National Transport Authority, NTA, An Coimisiún Pleanála and the Department of public

expenditure. It places that duty on all public bodies. Under section 7 of this Bill, when the Minister designates a project or programme as critical infrastructure, that climate duty no longer applies. To put this in context, over Christmas, the Minister for climate, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, announced that the Government was giving up on achieving Ireland's 2030 emissions targets four years before the deadline. Today, this Bill proposes to remove the climate duty from public bodies when they are undertaking assessments of major projects in the areas of water, transport and energy. Those are the very projects that will be the most consequential to our ability to meet those climate targets. The real-life implication of section 7 is to specifically deny bodies, such as An Coimisiún Pleanála, the ability to take the climate impact of major projects into account when making decisions about granting them planning permission. It applies irrespective of whether the project has a potentially positive climate impact, such as the wind farm in the Coolglass judgment, or a negative impact, such as a new liquefied natural gas, LNG, terminal. Section 7 of the Bill will, ironically, prevent the climate benefits of some projects counting in favour of whether that project should be granted planning permission.

Let us take an example. Say the NTA is trying to advance a new Luas line and there is a judicial review challenge to it on the basis that somebody does not want his or her garden to be the subject of a compulsory purchase order, CPO. The argument that in deciding to advance the project, the NTA was fulfilling its climate duty under section 15 of the climate action Act will no longer be available to the NTA because of section 7 of this Bill. While projects that will have a negative climate impact will be shielded by this Bill, the big projects that will have a positive climate impact will lose the additional legal protection that they enjoy as a result of the climate duty.

Considering how damaging section 7 is, why is it being proposed? This Bill is being promoted by the Government on the basis of cutting timelines and eliminating delays. We need to speed up our planning system and there are elements in the Government's accelerating infrastructure plan that I welcomed last December. If they were in a stand-alone Bill, I would have no problem supporting it.

However, the Government has produced no evidence that the climate duty is delaying infrastructure delivery. When the Minister launched the Accelerating Infrastructure Report and Action Plan in December, there was not one single reference to the climate action Act as a source of delays. I put the question to civil servants at the transport committee and the climate committee whether removing the climate duty would speed up the process and, on both occasions, the relevant civil servants were unable to say, "Yes, this will speed up the process." This evening, the Minister has indicated he is advancing section 7 because of judicial reviews. Can he enumerate the judicial reviews that have been taken on the basis of section 15 to date? Will he list them for us? Section 7 is not about speeding up the delivery of infrastructure. It is about repealing the climate action Act by the back door and protecting carbon intensive projects, the very projects that have caused our existing high levels of emissions as a country, from public scrutiny.

No pre-legislative scrutiny was permitted on this Bill, despite its huge implications for climate and planning policy. Therefore, in place of PLS, I will ask the Minister a few questions. Can he confirm that a strategic infrastructure project can only cover a project being proposed by a State body or agency and cannot cover a privately-funded project? Will he state whether he intends for data centres to fall within the definition of what could be designated as critical

infrastructure? Can he confirm that a direction under section 6(2) of the Bill cannot include a direction to a local authority or An Coimisiún Pleanála to grant or reject planning permission for a specific project?

In his conclusion, the Minister spoke about judicial reviews being taken for ideological reasons. This Bill represents an act of gross irresponsibility but I recognise it is entirely consistent with the approach the Government has taken since it assumed office last January because there is ideology at play here. A clear ideology is articulated across Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Independents. It is to lessen, undermine, defund and reverse climate action whenever it gets the opportunity. As I said when I spoke on the confidence motion and on the Government's retreat from the carbon tax earlier today, this Government has demonstrated it does not possess the belief in our energy transition and the decarbonisation of our economy to make the case for the change convincingly to the Irish people. This Bill is one more articulation of that ideology which lies at the heart of this Government.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The supposed purpose of the Bill is to speed up the delivery of infrastructure and get various different bodies to work together. I would welcome any genuine attempt to simplify planning and speed up infrastructure delivery, which takes forever and a day to get moving, to deliver it on time and at the target cost while environmental laws and regulations are not ridden roughshod over. However, the Bill has all the hallmarks of being about that. It is important that infrastructure delivery be accelerated and that it be brought in on time and on budget but sections 2, 3, 5 and 6 provide that the Minister can give directions to relevant bodies. Section 7 is the eye-opener where it disapplies section 15 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act to designated projects. When we had previous infrastructure legislation back in the 2000s, it was declared that it was only for public projects, but it turned out to be for private projects so it looks like data centres and everything else are included. That is no way to put public infrastructure in place. We need to do everything efficiently, but not at the cost of everything else and of rubbing out local democracy and riding roughshod over good environmental laws. It does nothing to improve any of that. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

I will turn to County Laois for a moment. The Minister for local government notified the local authority in Laois that he wants 5,000 more homes in the county. That is grand, but what he did not say was what infrastructure would be put in. Portlaoise, which has been targeted for a lot of that growth, needs a new primary school, which Ministers have told me in the House we do not need, despite the fact that hundreds of children are being bussed all over the county to school because there are no school places for them in Portlaoise, including the children on the estate where I live.

Laois is a relatively small county but 12,000 people are commuting out of it every morning to work, according to a local authority survey. Childcare cannot be accessed. Childcare places simply are not available in most of the county. We need one of the centres the Government has planned to deliver directly urgently in Laois. We could do with all eight in Laois and we would have just about enough. On wastewater facilities, I outlined in the House a few months ago that a number of towns and villages need wastewater and water treatment facilities and for water supply to be accelerated if we are going to have houses in them. Towns and villages such as Ballinakill, Borris-in-Ossory, Durrow, Ballylynan, Rathdowney, Mountmellick, Graiguecullen and so on are all short of infrastructure. The courthouse in Portlaoise has not

been delivered. We are still one of the nine counties without a domestic abuse refuge in 2026, and families and particularly women and children are being sent all over the place because we simply do not have the facility for them in the county. This is not good enough. The Bill does not address any of that.

I have real concerns about this. Critical infrastructure legislation was brought in in the 2000s and I recall arguing on local radio with Deputy Seán Fleming about it at the time. I was a local councillor and I recall pointing out what was going to happen and what it would do to destroy local democracy and ride roughshod over good planning rules. The Bill is being presented without pre-legislative scrutiny. I have huge concerns about this.

I would like the Minister to bring one issue to the attention to the Minister for local government. If he is going to demand all these houses are built in Laois, we will need infrastructure. There is no orbital route in Portlaoise. The Portlaoise northern orbital route is the number one priority, along with the Mountmellick link road, which will shorten the route for commuters so that people and particularly trucks will not have to travel as far. They are needed. We cannot have houses without that infrastructure. Where will the houses be built in Laois? Are they going to be built in fields with boreens going up to them or something? That number of houses cannot be put in without infrastructure.

I have outlined some of what is needed. It is grand for the boys and girls in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in the Custom House to draw up these figures and send them down to the county manager and tell him to get the councillors and officials to provide this. It cannot be done if we do not have the infrastructure. This is where we are falling down. A funding package was announced for the national development plan a few months ago and Laois was ignored in it, despite all the promises before the election. That is where we are.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú): Bomaite amháin. We have lost the clock. The Deputy has six and a half minutes. I will indicate two and one minutes with my fingers.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: In principle, the idea of getting State bodies to co-ordinate to accelerate the delivery of critical infrastructure and removing unnecessary obstacles to its development is a good one. I have concerns about the legislation but I would love to know whether it might be helpful in dealing with an issue in my constituency. This gets to the heart of my anxieties and concerns about what the Government's real motives and objectives are.

11 o'clock

I have raised a number of times the town centre in Cherrywood, which is the biggest residential development in the country. The entire development was really predicated on there being a town centre so you did not have to get in your car. You could walk everywhere in ten minutes because there would be community facilities, shop facilities and all of the rest of it. The developers built all of the houses and made a lot of money. They are still flipping properties and they are still getting rezonings and changes to the SDZs. Whatever developers ask for, they get from the State. They have made a lot of money but for the town centre, which the people who have moved in there need, as well as the amenities and critical structure, there is nothing. Well, sorry, there is one Tesco Express and a big hole in the ground.

The developers do not want to build the town centre because it is not really profitable for them. They are building houses and flipping properties after they got planning permission. They have started to sell properties again after getting a recent upzoning of the SDZs at higher densities. That is more money for them but they do not want to build the town centre. The Minister should tell me whether this will help get the developers to deliver the town centre. They will not even build a bridge from one part of Cherrywood to the other part, which is needed to link the two together, because it is not profitable for them. They are allowed to get away with this. We have been screaming about it, the residents have been screaming about it and they are allowed to get away with it. That is the sort of knocking heads together and getting Departments together I would like to see. Will the Government do something about that?

Here is another bit of co-ordination. In the same area where there is all this residential development, we need AstroTurf pitches and sports facilities. The clubs are crying out for them. They cannot get money or AstroTurf pitches for love nor money from the council, even though there is all of this residential development. Then, I hear that private developers have decided in the Cherrywood site that they want to build two ice hockey rinks and a convention centre for about €240 million. They want rezoning for it, which they got. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael councillors voted for it and the developers have asked the State for I do not know how much and the State will not even tell me. I have asked two parliamentary questions and the Department will not tell me for how much it has been asked for a private development for an ice hockey stadium.

Nobody in the area is asking for an ice hockey stadium. They want a town centre. They want AstroTurf pitches. They want their bridge. They want the affordable housing they were promised. They did not ask for a ice hockey rink. I am not against ice hockey, do not get me wrong, but the Government's councillors voted to give the developers the zoning they wanted and the Government will not even tell us how much money they have asked the Department for but the rumour is €60 million to €80 million. Football clubs cannot get an AstroTurf pitch, which costs less than €1 million, but we might be giving a private consortium €60 to €80 million to build ice hockey rinks that nobody asked for.

That worries me but it speaks to whom the Government prioritises. When the Government says about this legislation that it wants to remove obstacles, it does not seem to be anything about that but instead it is about the objectors. The objectors are the problem and the people who put in submissions to developments are the problem and not the 90,000 planning permissions that have been given and granted for houses in this country. Property developers sit on them, however, and do not do anything with them because it is profitable to sit on them and wait for the prices to go up, stay up or they flip the properties. No, there is nothing done about that but the Government is giving out about the objectors and it does not want oversight in respect of climate obligations, that is, the disapplication of section 15.

To me, that smacks of LNG. That is what I hear in respect of LNG. We do not want any of the obligations under climate legislation to impact on our ability to develop liquid natural gas infrastructure. I seriously ask the question if this will apply to private, for-profit developments? We need renewable wind resources but why is it the Government has given away all of the sites to private companies? When the wind energy and our marine resources are developed for wind energy, we get nothing from it. We are giving to international consortiums. Even the French

state will own more of the wind produced off the east coast of Ireland than the people of Ireland will because the Government has given away the sites to the French state energy company.

I seriously worry what the Government's motives and objectives are here. I would like to hear some soothing words of reassurance that it will actually deal with the issues but the fact is the Government hands over responsibility to private developers for so much of the infrastructure, whether it is housing, energy and of course the data centres. I mean, Jesus, by 2030, it is estimated 30% of the electricity in this country will go to the data centres. They are hoovering up the energy we are creating for the benefit of some of the wealthiest companies in the world but doing very little for employment and serving no real purpose other than to make profits for these companies.

Yes, the Government should knock heads together, remove unnecessary sequential planning decisions and so on but I am seriously concerned the Government is actually just trying to remove climate obligations through the backdoor and its over-reliance or prioritisation of private developers' interests mean it will be them who benefit from it rather than the public interest.

Deputy Joe Neville: I speak here tonight on a fascinating day in its own way. In here in the Dáil Chamber, we saw many different things happening. At the same time, this ultimately is really important legislation before us here tonight. I have seen many contributors from different sides, some positive and some negative, but it really speaks to the importance of infrastructure for us and within our own areas. Many people spoke about their own towns and their own villages because ultimately, that is the infrastructure they are all aware of. Whether it was towns like Oranmore that was mentioned, towns in Cork or the aforementioned in south Dublin, the need for infrastructure with housing all across their areas is key.

As a country, one thing we probably have failed to keep up with is the delivery of key infrastructure in Ireland. We have been an economic success story and indeed, an industrial powerhouse for our size but we do not have the infrastructure we deserve. This legislation may be one small step on the road to helping deliver that infrastructure. Hopefully, this Bill will be the start of that infrastructure being delivered into the country. As a public representative in north Kildare, I see all too clearly the lack of infrastructure, be it the lack of a second bridge in Celbridge, be it the DART+ not having gone out so far or be it a need for a second bridge in Clane for which there already is a need, not to mind the need for the type of social infrastructure Deputy Boyd Barrett spoke about. There is a need for more GPs, new astro pitches and the schools we all know too well but what we are talking about here specifically is the critical infrastructure and the difficulties we have in the State in delivering it.

In fairness, I heard Deputy O'Gorman asking key questions as well. All of those will be looked at and focused on. Deputy Boyd Barrett asked similar questions about the environment but at the same time, we have seen that as a country, we have got bogged down in judicial reviews and public authorities delivering what they should do. I think it was Deputy Hearne when I listened to him earlier on who said these should be basic things that should already be in place and about the idea and concept that public bodies are not speaking to each other as a matter of course and are not working each other as a matter of course. Ultimately, we are all finding to our cost they are not doing so, hence the reason there is a need for this legislation.

We all know the need for key infrastructure. Indeed, we have seen the impact of where there have been difficulties with infrastructure. Only in the last week, we have seen how quickly the country can grind to a halt if that infrastructure is not in place in certain ways. What we are doing here is to deliver even more of that same infrastructure.

Obviously, as someone on the infrastructure committee, I have seen many of the aforementioned groups who have come to us, be it from a building perspective, a planning perspective, local authorities, Uisce Éireann or whoever they may be and we all know the range of difficulties they face in delivering their own key infrastructure. We need to ensure they have the best way of delivering it. This Government has put forward €102 billion to be spent in the next four years. That is a significant amount of money in a country that has a significant need for infrastructure. Hopefully, we will be able to deliver that in the term of this Government.

I know it is a significant pressure. A key factor that ultimately will decide the fate of many of us who are on this side of the Chamber is whether we can deliver that infrastructure for the country. I hope to do so. I also hope this Critical Infrastructure Bill, not to mind its impossible imperfections or whether it does enough, is ultimately a step in the right direction. I hope it will have faster and better delivery and ensure the co-ordination and the streamlined nature of improved projects in the years ahead.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: I join colleagues in underlining just how important it is that we get this Bill right. The Critical Infrastructure Bill is really important legislation for this Dáil. We in Ireland are living with the legacy of many years of underinvestment in capital infrastructure, as my colleague has said. We see it very clearly in the lack of essential flood defences in particular in so many constituencies across Ireland. My colleague, Councillor Clodagh Ní Mhuirí, has highlighted the need for climate adaptation projects at local authority level to be classified as critical infrastructure projects so that they just get done. Storm Chandra inflicted huge damage on communities. We were fortunate at the time that this storm occurred at low tide. We will not always be that lucky when it comes to flooding. Looking at the numbers, of 54 large flood defence projects deemed critical in 2018, 31 remain at preliminary design stage. How is that acceptable? Forget about climate, how is it acceptable that of 54 large projects, 31 are still in design? Ignoring the climate crisis, that is just not acceptable. When you put the climate crisis on top of it, it is even worse.

We are not alone in facing those challenges. Countries across the world are recognising that we have to get a fundamental reset between planning regulation and timely delivery of really important flood defence infrastructure. Bad weather has potential to wreak havoc on communities, as we have seen, and the longer we drag our feet, the more people will suffer. Flooding is now a recurring reality for many communities in nearly all parts of this country. Homes are damaged, businesses are destroyed, victims of flooding have to put their lives back together piece by piece with some support from the State - sometimes without some support - and insurance then, of course, disappears. It is unachievable. I also agree with other speakers regarding the climate implications of the Bill. It is really important that we meet our climate obligations and we do not sidestep those. We have to square up to decarbonisation. Finally, I ask that the Aire ensure climate adaptation projects are classified as critical infrastructure so that projects and communities finally get the defences they have been waiting for for so long.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: For the day that is in it, it may have won the vote of confidence but I can assure the Minister that his Government has lost the support - if it ever had it - and the confidence of the people. Public services are under huge pressure. Many services do not work properly and we see billions of hard-earned euro wasted, often due to poor planning. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are serious wasters of public funding. Never has so much been spent to deliver so little. Much of our infrastructure is crumbling. Our housing crisis continues with 17,000 people in emergency accommodation and we have a broken planning process. A total of 22,200 children are waiting on their legal entitled assessment of needs. Critical infrastructure is not planned for or delivered. This is the legacy of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael for 100 years.

On this Bill in particular, waiving the pre-legislative scrutiny is a mistake. Given the Government's record of failure to deliver value for money, the Opposition is right to be critical of that. Bills should face all opportunities for scrutiny in order that we strengthen them and are not correcting a mistake after the Bill has been enacted. A concern of mine is that the Bill does not define what critical infrastructure is but rather leaves that to the gift of the Minister. When we talk about infrastructure we all have our own projects in our own areas, but talking about Limerick and the Munster region, we obviously look at the Limerick to Cork motorway. It is long promised and not delivered. They are probably the only two regional cities or second and third cities across western Europe that are not connected by motorway and it will be years before that is done. In Limerick, we recently opened the Coonagh to Knockalisheen road. It is not completed but that was over 20 years in planning and was hard fought for by the communities in Moyross in particular to get it over the line. Another piece of infrastructure that is needed in Limerick is the northern distributor road. Businesses will say they need this, as will IBEC and universities, whether the Technological University of the Shannon on one side or University of Limerick at the other side, to relieve the pressure on the north side of Limerick and south-east Clare, where it is particularly needed. It would really be an extension of the Coonagh to Knockalisheen road, and that is not even in the national development plan. It was pulled by the Green Party in the previous Government and there is no sign of it in this Government. It is an economic artery for Limerick. As I have said, it would service both universities and the business park in the Castletroy area, which are struggling. Traffic is unbelievable and we need to sort that out soon. We have people backed up on the Mackey roundabout and they cannot get off on the M7 or the motorway to access Limerick.

Bus services in Limerick, where they do exist, are unfortunately sometimes not reliable. Sometimes they are non-existent. One example of that is the Condell Road in the city. I have raised that before. We have a bus lane in that area. The bus lane has been there for a number of years but there is actually no local bus service on it. We have built hundreds of local authority houses and affordable houses through approved housing bodies in the area but there is no bus connection. Rail services, where they exist, are very slow and very sparse. For instance, we have the Castleconnell to Limerick city service and, for some inexplicable reason, we cannot deliver extra capacity and extra services on that. It is a no-brainer.

Then we come to the issue of offshore wind. We have the unique opportunity in the Limerick area, particularly with the Foynes Port, the deepest port in the island and a huge stretch of river. As the world is moving into critical danger, if we do not deliver to make our country energy secure with the opportunity to do it through offshore wind, we will be buying

that from abroad. We have the opportunity to buy our own, make ourselves energy sufficient and export wind or we can buy it back in ourselves.

The HIQA report launched on 30 September had three options in it. We still do not know if we are going to build a second hospital in the mid-west. While this is committed to, there is no plan for it and no management committee set up. There is no progress on that and we do not know where we are. Trolley numbers in Limerick this week have been some of the highest we have seen across the State.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Critical infrastructure gaps in this country are probably the worst legacy of the Government over the last number of years. This country is really poorly served by infrastructure. The Government's friends in the IMF say that Ireland lags by 32% behind our peers in terms of infrastructure delivery. The biggest cost on society is the fact that this Government cannot deliver infrastructure. For ten years after the crash, the Government spending was second-last from the bottom in terms of infrastructure. Only Romania spent less on infrastructural development than this country. Therefore, there was massive capital depreciation in Ireland as a result of the lack of investment by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. All of that has had enormous human consequences. The national children's hospital, promised by Leo Varadkar by 2020 save an asteroid hitting the planet and to be delivered for €700 million, is still not open and has been delayed for the 18th time by the Government. A total of €300 million has been spent on metro north and not a shovel has been put in the ground as of yet. It is 20 years in the making. The Navan to Dublin rail line was promised in 1994 by the Minister's colleague, Noel Dempsey, and it will not be built any earlier than 2036. People will have started work when that project was announced and they will have retired before that project will be delivered. The damage the Government is doing to people's lives is an absolute disgrace.

The lack of infrastructural development in this country is tearing at the very fabric of communities and lives. I will give an example of this in the Navan to Dublin rail line. Right now it is taking between two and three hours for people to get to and from work. I was listening to all the debates about the blockages of roads and how long it was taking for people to get around the country. I was just thinking people should just travel from Navan to Dublin for work every day and they would know exactly what it means to not be able to get to work on time. This means children are growing up with anxiety at the moment because they do not see their parents from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. Their parents only have about 20 minutes to half an hour to put their children to bed every night. Football clubs are going without volunteers because there is simply nobody around in the evenings to be able to train their kids because of these difficulties.

The lack of infrastructure has had an enormous impact on the human fabric and the community fabric right through Ireland.

It was interesting that the day it was announced the national children's hospital was going to be delayed for the 18th time was the day the Government decided it was not going to have any pre-legislative scrutiny on this particular Bill. We had the enormous catastrophe that is the national children's hospital, an example of the Government getting everything wrong, and then the Government announcing a Bill and saying, "No, we don't need to actually to do pre-legislative scrutiny on this; it is not necessary." I do not know whether it is incompetence or

laziness from the Government's perspective but that is what happened. It is interesting that at that moment in time the Minister for Health was asked when the hospital would open and she said the opening date is in the hands of BAM. The Minister is getting €200,000 a year in wages and she is not in control of the biggest infrastructure project delivery in Ireland. That is startling. I have read through this Bill. I do not see anything in this Bill at the moment that would speed up the national children's hospital. There is nothing in the Bill, when a project is in situ, that would actually make it happen faster.

The other thing I was struck by when I read this Bill was that it looks like an Opposition party's Bill, which has no capacity to draft a Bill and put detail in it. All the Opposition parties, every now and again, introduce a Bill to generate a debate on an issue. They know it is never going to be good enough because they do not have the ability to do it. This looks exactly the same. I am amazed by how light it is, by the lack of detail and the lack of elements in it. If we cut to the key element of the Bill, it will prioritise some projects over others. This Bill will raise some projects up the queue, which will mean other projects will go down the queue. There is no net development.

If we look at what is happening at the moment and the real problems - and the Minister knows this too - we have the slowest planning processing, the slowest permitting, the slowest licensing, the slowest tendering and the slowest procurement in the EU, and judicial reviews are among the slowest and most held in this State. Nothing in the Bill that changes that.

There is marginal stuff about judicial review. It could be said that the climate Act change could affect some judicial reviews, but there is nothing in this Bill that, outside of that, will change the speed of that process. There is no net change in the speed of progress in the delivery of all those aspects. There are issues about co-operation and issues about different Departments. I welcome that and it is probably a good thing that is actually on a statutory legal level. I admit that, but there is no penalty if it does not happen. If the Minister tells a Department that it has to co-operate and do X,Y and Z in terms of co-ordination and it does not do it, what happens in that scenario?

All of those issues are really departmental management issues anyway. There is nothing stopping a Minister in a Department addressing the elements of the planning process in more co-ordinated fashion, making sure that, for example, a planning application does not need to have 30,000 pages and does not need a van to bring it to the local authority or saying we do not need four different versions of the planning application and that we need one version of the planning application that is suitable for all the different agencies that are necessary for it to go through.

There is no net capacity being put into this system in relation to this. What extra resources are going to be added? An Coimisiún Pleanála officials came before the committee and said they did not have enough staff to do the job they have to do. They did say that and the Minister should not shake his head. I was sitting in front of them in that committee. They have delays still on the applications going through. I know of builders who are waiting 20 months for their application to go through. Why? Because it is not a priority application and therefore it is not getting through.

Uisce Éireann officials were in front of the infrastructure committee a little while ago. I asked them how long it is going to take Uisce Éireann to fill the gaps in the water infrastructure

in this country that are currently putting blockages on the building of homes. They said 2050 is the hold up. I do not see anything in this Bill that is going to change that necessarily, other than the prioritisation, which means it is a zero-sum situation. One project moves up and another project moves down. What resources will be added to the likes of An Coimisiún Pleanála? We had representatives of the local authorities in front of the infrastructure committee and we asked did they have enough planners within the planning offices. They said they did not and that they needed another 500 planners in the system.

Those are the practical elements. This is a lightweight Bill that, if we look at the enormity of the infrastructural deficit in this country and the damage it is doing to people, is an insult to that problem in reality. I am not confident. For example, most regulations are the same here. Yes, the climate Act is one change. There is no change to the habitat regulation in the context of the legislation. It is European. The Government will hold the Presidency of the European Commission for six months shortly. I have spoken to the Minister's junior Ministers and they are telling me that this regulation is a major block in the building of homes.

Midleton flood defences were promised in 2015. There is an elderly gentleman at the moment in Midleton who, when it rains heavily, stays awake at night as a human water gauge to make sure the water does not get to a certain level that people die. This is not going to speed up Midleton. Midleton is a habitats directive issue. Most of the flood defences in this country are habitats. The pearl mussel in Enniscorthy is going to be comfortable on the riverbed in Enniscorthy for another 15 years. The livelihoods of the people of Enniscorthy are not going to be comfortable and this Bill is not going to make a blind bit of difference to that.

The Government is going to need regulatory changes, which will need European changes too, to make sure we can get the infrastructure built in this country as well. I laughed out loud when I heard the Minister's statement about not weaponising the climate Act because it is an admission that the climate Act has been weaponised against development in this country, but who passed the climate Act? It is an admission that the Government parties did something really damaging to the development of this country.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this. I want to be very clear that I am all for speeding up any infrastructure in the line of what Government needs to do, be that roads, rail or housing. There are a few issues. I am trying to get my head around parts of this Bill. Is this Bill solely for Government and semi-State bodies? I am asking whether some wind developer somewhere that is tormenting some community will be able to avail of that in some part of the country or is it just for Government projects, be they roads or hospitals? It would be great to get clarification on that from the Minister and his officials if that could be explained. I just cannot get my head around that.

I have no problem if, in a Bill, the State needs to be able to build hospitals or build roads or whatever it needs to build quicker. However, there is one part I worry about that has been mentioned, and which I have spoken to the Minister before about, and that is the Bill seems to push the critical infrastructure up to the top of the pile to get looked at. That is my understanding of it and that is fine, but I see ordinary people out there. We need quarries, whether people like it or not, to be able to build infrastructure. Let nobody cod themselves about that. There are people waiting who have applications in with An Bord Pleanála and all they get is a letter saying it is another few months gone, and another few months. The way

they treat ordinary, private persons that way is disgraceful. With the best will in the world, we get that when an application for planning is put in, it is good to get it to the top of the pile.

If we continue with the habitats directive in its present form, God help any Minister because there is a rigmarole they will have to go through.

I have been dealing with the habitats directive for the last 20 years or more. What has happened with the habitats directive is that it started off as a directive. It then started going into the European Court of Justice, ECJ, and it started to put us in straitjacket after straitjacket. With the best will in the world to any Department, we get frustrated when things are not delivered.

If we go back a few years ago and down to Lough Talt, when Jerry Grant was in Irish Water at the time, we had to go to Europe for an Article 6(3) or Article 6(4) imperative reasons of overriding public interest, IROPI, exception. No matter how you go about it, it is going to take three or four years, and it will continue unless we get some legislation put in place. I have mentioned this before to Ministers. I remember when Eamon Ryan was here, at the time we needed the jet engines to basically keep the power on or to have backup. I remember it was the Bord na Móna Bill, I think, that came in here one night. It was a Bill that basically went over all the habitats directive, and you could drive on. I think it was for three years and it could be renewed again, or whatever. Environmental impact assessments, EIAs, appropriate assessments, AAs, and all this craic we have to go on with would not have had to be done. He was able to get that legislation through because, obviously, there was an amber light on our electricity situation at the time. The legislation was put through here one night.

For a Government seeking to build housing projects, and for the likes of Irish Water if it needs sewers and water, if we do not have sewers, water and roads, we are not going to build anything. That is what will happen if we do not go down that road. It will probably mean a clash with Europe, because even in Germany a snail was holding up things. I remember what happened at Lough Talt that time. There is the madness that is going on in some of this. A certain type of snail was supposed to have been in Lough Talt. I do not know how many years it had been gone for, but it was still necessary to do all the rigmarole. The project was being blocked. This was even though the pipe was coming out and Sligo County Council at the time was putting out the water daily. Irish Water was turning that pipe not near the lake, but 800 m away. It was going using the water, but it had to get an extraction licence. It was being blocked from getting that extraction licence. I spoke to Jerry Grant one evening across the road in Buswells. We went through it. That type of situation is costing money and slowing jobs by three and four years. It is ferocious. It is one thing I would ask all the Ministers to do something about. It is the bane of our lives now. It impacts when we try to extend an airport or a port. Galway Port was impacted. It impacts when there is an attempt to do a road. No matter what infrastructure is being done, it impacts, even in the case of youngsters. The designated area within 15 km of a place is now basically being called a screening-out area.

I saw a place in Clonberne where there was a young couple building a house. There was no designation near them. It was sent out that they needed an EIA, a screening out and all this. We were asking why. The drain near the back of that house was going into the Sinking river, up through Sliabh and heading to Dunmore to another river. It was going up to the River Clare and into the River Corrib, some 40 miles away. That is what frustrates me. I get so frustrated

over watching things like that. It cost that young couple a couple of grand more to do all that, at least. That was at the time, but it would be way more now.

I will explain the problem. When we were in the bogs, we were on our ground. We were able to stand our battle. Even though people accused us of all types of things, we were able to say that was our ground. A government has to adhere to whatever legislation is in front of it, rightly or wrongly. In my opinion, unless it does that, it is pointless. We can put something to the top of the heap, but to get to the top of the heap, in the midst of EIAs, screenings out, appropriate assessments and all of that, is where I fear there is a major problem.

As I said, on principle, I would like clarification on that aspect for private operators. That is the one part I would like the Minister to clarify, if his officials get the chance. I am not putting him on the spot tonight. I would like to know that. For the likes of Irish Water, the ESB and all the semi-States and Government bodies, I think we need to be able to deliver stuff faster. In a lot of cases, the money is there, but we cannot build it. That is sickening altogether. One time ago, we did not have the money, but we would have been able to build it. Now, we have gone *vice versa*. I ask the Minister if he could do that. I thank him very much.

Deputy Barry Ward: I have been listening to the debate and it has been astonishing to hear the variety of opinions, concerns and misapprehensions about this Bill. On the one hand, I think it does represent progress. I remember when the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act was passed in 2006 and how that was a step forward in terms of bringing those strategic infrastructure projects into An Bord Pleanála, as it then was, rather than having them always going through local authorities and being delayed that way. In many ways, the 2006 Act was a step forward, but it did not really work, because we have found ourselves in a situation where we are still being delayed with those important strategic applications being made.

On the one hand, I recognise the potential progress that comes from this Bill and its necessity in terms of moving these critical infrastructure projects along. On the other hand, I have listened to what people have said about their concerns regarding what the impact of this legislation might be, specifically the modification of the way section 15 of the climate action Act will operate. Some Members have, essentially, catastrophised about the notion that suddenly we will be throwing out the door any concerns about climate action or taking cognisance of the fact that this is an existential threat for us, not just in this country but throughout the world.

If I thought that was the case, I must say I would have a real problem with this legislation. I think, however, that two things hold for me. First, and most importantly, European law is still supreme to this legislation. This means the safeguards people are concerned about are still there at a European level, and challenges will still be possible in that context. The second thing is that there was a suggestion that I think is grounded in the notion that we cannot trust the Government to do the right thing. I fundamentally reject that. I know this is a week in which many people in this Chamber are suggesting that, but there is not actually a basis for that view. There is not any evidence to back it up. In my lifetime as an adult, if I can put it that way, the Government has consistently acted responsibly. I know we had a crash 15 years ago and there was irresponsibility that led to that, and that is fine, but in terms of corruption, all the indicators internationally are that this is a country in which we have gone away from corruption. We have

moved away from the corruption we saw in the 1990s, which resulted - regressively, I think - in the removal of all these powers from local authority members. That is for another day's debate. I do not think there is any basis now on which people should be suspicious about the operation of policy by the Government, which is elected by the people.

There was talk about a lack of transparency. I note, for example, that section 3(4) requires that any orders made under section 3 would be laid before the Dáil within a reasonable period of time. There is, therefore, transparency there. People will know what orders have been made, what the basis of those orders is for and what the impact of those orders would be. I kind of feel that any of those concerns that have been outlined are assuaged by what is actually in the Bill. I think the safeguards that are there mean we do not need to catastrophise about this legislation. It does not represent some kind of catastrophic or disastrous relinquishment of the important laws in relation to climate change and the safeguards that exist for climate change.

I have heard other colleagues complaining about snails, frogs, bats, mosses and all that kind of thing. Those are important things, and we should not downplay the importance of biodiversity and the protection of that biodiversity. When I look at this legislation, I also think about the strategic progress that needs to be made in terms of what we actually deliver for people in this country. At the moment, we have a situation where the types of projects that I anticipate will be covered by this legislation are, on average, taking 63 weeks to get to first-stage approval. This is before any challenges that might arise by way of judicial review or anything else. That is nearly two years. It is an astonishingly long time and an unnecessarily long time. The system at the moment is broken insofar as it is not delivering those projects.

The examples that spring to mind when we talk about climate, for example, are renewable energy projects, including wind farms.

It takes a long time to get a wind farm up and running and, as we stand here, there is not a single operational offshore wind farm in Ireland. That is a shameful statistic. As we look at solar projects, wind projects, onshore as well, and wave projects we hope will come in the future, we need to be able to action them much more quickly than we are. In an ironic way, they are the very tools that will help us combat the climate crisis, reduce our carbon emissions and replace dirty energy with clean and renewable energy. What this Bill does makes perfect sense to me. We will be supporting legislation that is actually going to implement a change in the manner in which we create this critical infrastructure and make it available to the people of Ireland to help them solve problems into the future. God knows we have enough problems to solve. Many significant infrastructural problems have been allowed to languish over a generation, in essence. We need to take action on them.

I think of my own area in Dún Laoghaire. I am forever harping on about water quality. We have a Victorian sewer system that means that when there is a high rainfall event or a lot of water, the run-off goes into the sewer system, down to the back of the West Pier in Dún Laoghaire, and an under-seabed pipe pumps the sewage from the West Pier pumping station to the Poolbeg sewage treatment plant, where it is treated and then discharged into the sea. That is fine, but the pipe only has a given capacity. When there is a lot of rain and the run-off also goes into that sewer system, there is overcapacity at the pumping station. There is an attenuation tank that is 70,000 cu. m. It fills up. That is fine, and it holds the sewage until such time as it can be pumped through to Poolbeg, but when there is a lot of rain it fills up. When it is full, there is nowhere for the material to go but into the sea. We have many videos of this

big, black slick coming into Dublin Bay off the back of the West Pier when that attenuation tank is full, and more raw sewage flows into it and there is nowhere for it to go but into the sea, in which we fish for our food and swim for recreation and have water sports. The same water that people swim in and eat from is having raw sewage pumped into it. There is no real justification for that except for the fact we have not taken the infrastructural solutions and implemented them to ensure there is a second attenuation tank at the back of the West Pier. That is a relatively straightforward, simple, implementable solution to that problem.

The longer term, much more complex, essentially multigenerational and multibillion euro project is to reform our sewerage and water systems so that we recycle water within homes, use sustainable urban drainage systems and ensure we minimise the use of water in real terms. That is a longer term project but we could build a second attenuation tank next to the West Pier pumping station at the gut at the back of the West Pier in Dún Laoghaire, which would solve that problem in the short term. At the moment not only is that overflowing into the sea but the time lapse in informing people who are swimming in the sea is so slow that they will already have swum in their own discharge - I do not know what the right word to use for that is - and they will not know about it until a day later when the tests come back to show there is bacteria in the water. If that is not something from a different age, I do not know what is, and it is solvable. It is exactly this kind of legislation that will help us solve it in the short term. That is a project that will be caught up in the 63-week delay before we can start construction, and that is provided there is not a challenge.

On the subject of challenges, I heard some speakers speaking about how there is an attempt to shut down those using the courts to be activists for better standards and regulation and to stop things happening that should not happen. I agree with them that it is important to allow that to happen. I do not think the answer is to cut out judicial review. The answer is in two forms. The first is to have the judicial reviews but to speed them up. We should use a commercial court-style system, as was used in Ireland in the 1990s to speed up commercial cases. That can also be done for judicial reviews against planning systems. However, that also requires an investment in the Judiciary and more judges to hear those cases so they actually happen more quickly. There are cases where the litigants should be told, "This is the way it's going to happen. Here is your timeline. This is when it's going to be heard and if you're not ready, you're the one who loses out." That can be done to make judicial review more efficient and thereby not deny people their rights of access to the courts to challenge decisions they have a problem with. As we know because they succeed, they are often right about the challenges they bring. The practical import of the challenges they bring is that they slow down the delivery of infrastructure, and there is no need for that process to restrict or inhibit the production of the critical infrastructure that is named in the Bill.

Something else that springs to mind, which I frequently speak about, is the notion of an underground metro system for Dublin. The reality is that we need to start it. Because of massive infrastructure projects that have overrun and become problematic, the obvious one being the children's hospital, to a large extent politicians and the public service in Ireland are afraid of large-scale infrastructure projects. This is because they can prove so problematic and are so complex and, to a large extent, because the expertise is not there in the public service and we rely on external services to deliver them, which does not always work.

In terms of building the metro, we do not have to implement a 100-stop metro in the morning or something the size of that in Paris, London or somewhere like that. We can do what they do in Paris, which is to build a short line with a small number of stops. This is the first project. For example, if I think of Paris, the line 14, which was built in the past 25 or 30 years, started off with four stops in central Paris. The project is called Météor. It is a driverless train that is deeper, cleaner and fully wheelchair accessible. They built four stops and it now runs all the way from Saint-Lazare in north-west central Paris to Orly Airport. Initially they built a small line and added on a station at each end and then another station and another station. Instead of having a behemoth of an infrastructural project, they had smaller, bite-size projects that were more manageable. Even if such smaller projects do go pear-shaped for some reason, there is a way in which they do not impact on the delivery of the overall ambition over a period of years.

These projects can be done, but in order to do them and deliver 21st-century water treatment facilities for people in Dublin, and in order to deliver 21st-century or even 20th-century public transport systems, we have to approach this with some purpose. The Bill is the first step of that process, to my mind. Notwithstanding the concerns some Members have, and these can all be managed and we can look at the safeguards that are there, this is the way in which we get rid of the delays. We target certain projects and at governmental level we identify them and say a certain project is critical, and that for another one we will make the order under section 3 and make it happen. If we can do that, it is a good thing for people in Dublin and throughout the country. If we can deliver those projects that make their lives better and easier and reduce our carbon emissions and delays, it will create a better infrastructural society for us all. If the Bill can do this and if it is a step down that road, then it is a good thing. On this basis alone, I will welcome the Bill and support it as it goes through.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I agree. We all know where there have been deficits in infrastructure. We know the issues that have existed where people have played the system. That is undoubted. We have also seen situations where we have not seen perfect engagement, be it from the State or developers. We have all seen it in our constituencies. We have seen where pre-consultation and consultation have been done well, where they have removed some of the fears there can be in relation to projects, and then we have seen them progress better.

It goes without saying we are talking about areas where we cannot necessarily deliver clean water or a sewerage system that is fit for purpose, and we are talking about this in 2026. Irrespective of the absolutely rightful arguments there were earlier on the fuel crisis and the ineptitude of the Government in dealing with it, at the end of the day there has been abject failure in dealing with our infrastructural deficits and we all need to see this improved 100%.

I agree with what many have said, that we are somewhat worried about the fact that pre-legislative scrutiny was waived. I would like to think there will be sufficient time on Committee Stage and that we will not be looking at guillotined legislation from the point of view of working through all of the necessary amendments and arguments that need to be made. Every time the Government has come up with the ultimate legislative solution in relation to infrastructural deficits, it has not changed anything to date. If we look at the Planning and Development Act, planners who spoke to me said it was more sentences, more paragraphs and more words that would be dissected in courtrooms.

That was their belief. We need simplicity in this. There is nobody who does not want to see this sort of critical infrastructure being delivered and to reduce and streamline. We constantly talk about streamlining. We know the issues that have existed in the planning system. Obviously, we need to be able to get to grip with the circumstances. We are pretty late in getting into this game, or the Government is anyway. We need to know what exactly is going to fall into the sphere of critical infrastructure. I know people have asked about anaerobic digestion and renewables. Are we talking about State projects or is there room for manoeuvre in relation to other projects? Again, that is about making sure we do not undermine the piece I spoke about where we need to make sure we can at least have decent consultation with people.

I could talk about the rail infrastructure in County Louth and the need for more stations but I would start with Dundalk's Clarke Station. We are all talking about the absolute need for public transport, particularly this week, but we do not have enough parking spaces at that station. We have fewer than we had because they were taken away. We are awaiting some sort of solution on that. Even simple solutions like that are not being delivered.

We talk about water. It will be years before we see the CFRAM plan delivered in County Louth. We are talking about five projects. As I have said many times before, I live in the Bay Estate and we have a joint sewerage and rainwater system-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mairéad Farrell): Go raibh maith agat.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: -----and any time it rains heavily we are in danger of flooding.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mairéad Farrell): Go raibh maith agat, a Theachta.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: It will be years before this is upgraded.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mairéad Farrell): Go raibh maith agat, a Theachta.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: The Chair is putting pressure on me. I was in Scoil Bhríde in Síolach the other day. It is an absolutely fabulous school. It has been okayed for two extra teachers but not okayed in any way, shape or form for the two extra rooms that are needed, and that is before the second sanctioned ASD class.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mairéad Farrell): Go raibh maith agat, a Theachta.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I would probably need about 25 minutes to go through all of this and I would still leave some projects behind.

Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (Deputy Jack Chambers): Fair play to Deputy Ó Murchú. He always gets a lot in during the few minutes. I thank all Members of the House for their contributions to this

evening's debate. We look forward to further engagement on the Bill as it progresses to Committee Stage. It is clear from the broader contributions that there is a consensus on the need to really reform how we deliver infrastructure. As I said at the outset, the publication of the Bill achieves one of the many actions in the Accelerating Infrastructure report. Really it is about the cumulative implementation of this, which will drive a much quicker and transformative approach to accelerating infrastructure.

I have set out why radical change is necessary. We have a persistent infrastructure deficit, the consequences of which we in this House have to deal with and which are articulated by Members daily. Without radical reform we simply will not close the gap, leaving our people stuck in traffic and with too few homes to house our population, and build the infrastructure to bridge and affirm the wider ambition we have for economic and social infrastructure for the State.

The Critical Infrastructure Bill places obligations on the Government. It requires us to take hard decisions about prioritisation and to identify a small number of those projects or programmes that are fundamental to everything else we wish to achieve. Others have said that and Deputy Fitzmaurice mentioned it. Water, energy and transport systems are the foundations that drive overall delivery and economic development, whether it is in housing or other areas. By doing this we send a clear and unambiguous signal to the entire system that the projects and programmes are of strategic importance and in the public interest. It allows public bodies to reallocate the resources necessary to prioritise the consideration of these projects. The net effect of this should be a significant acceleration of these critical projects and programmes. This will in turn enable the acceleration of all other economic and social infrastructure necessary for society to thrive.

The Bill is short and carefully targeted legislation. It does not reference specific projects. It will provide the Government with the statutory power to designate projects or programmes as critical infrastructure by order. We have had some questions about whether it is all projects, public and private. It is clear in the definition of a project in the Bill that it is a project the purpose of which is the delivery of infrastructure and that is funded by capital investment by or on behalf of the State or by or on behalf of a public body. I think that clarifies this matter, which was raised by Deputies. Any such order will be laid before Dáil Éireann, and if a resolution annulling the order is passed by Dáil Éireann within the next 21 days on which Dáil Éireann has sat after the order has been laid, it can be annulled accordingly. The Government will consider specific projects or programmes that may be designated as critical infrastructure following my written recommendation.

It is important to consider that the process of designating projects can only work if restraint is exercised in the designation. Designating too many projects will not allow the licensing, consenting and planning bodies to effectively prioritise. It is intended that the process of identifying which projects or programmes are designated and subject to accelerated consideration will commence quickly after the Bill has been enacted. Once the Government has designated a project or programme, every public body that is involved in a licence, consent or permission associated with the critical infrastructure will be required to prioritise, avoid delay, reduce timelines, parallel processes and co-operate to fast-track critical infrastructure through their existing processes. It also allows and mandates whole-of-state co-operation and ensures critical projects and programmes receive co-ordinated attention across Departments,

regulators and agencies. Establishing a clear legal basis for this prioritisation ensures that it receives the fast and co-ordinated attention across the system. The legislation gives the Minister power to issue a direction to any of the public bodies involved in the process, and this will be used to drive improved timelines and performance and, if necessary, mandate all public bodies to take the necessary steps to accelerate their processes.

Deputies will be aware, and it was mentioned by a number of Deputies, that I was granted exemption from pre-legislative scrutiny, but this request was not made lightly. We have set an ambitious timeline for implementation because we want to drive delivery and it is in the overriding public interest that we find the means of accelerating certain critical projects and programmes that are fundamental to our provision of social and economic infrastructure. This is why the waiving of pre-legislative scrutiny is important in that context. I value and welcome a thorough and robust discussion on the legislation at the committee as well. I will engage constructively with all Deputies on that to get this right. It has been argued by some in this House, and there were many mentions here, that the solution to delays is more resourcing or staffing for public bodies. In fact, that is not the issue in many instances. An Coimisiún Pleanála has almost doubled its staffing in the last ten years while staffing in the Environmental Protection Agency is up nearly 50% in five years. Fundamentally, what we need to do is reform, simplify and accelerate much of the bureaucratic practice that has seen the development process for infrastructure double in the past 20 years.

There has also been reference to section 15 of the climate Act. The disapplication of it means that public bodies can no longer be challenged on how they have assessed these considerations in their decision-making processes and it removes an avenue for judicial review, nothing more. I take the example of the reaction to the Galway ring road only last week and the concern by certain interest groups that they will not be able to use section 15 to try to use the courts to block a piece of critical infrastructure for the west. There are already many comments from Friends of the Environment wanting to use section 15 to stop a piece of critical infrastructure. I have canvassed in Galway and in the west, as have Deputies across the House. Every second door I knocked on wanted to see that happen. If we want the industrial development to happen in the west and if we want to see housing built in the west, then we cannot have the weaponisation of the climate Act for a piece of critical infrastructure. That is just one example in the context of the wider reform piece, which is why it is important to disapply section 15 in the context of critical infrastructure for the State.

The Critical Infrastructure Bill seeks to fast-track the process for designating projects and programmes through the existing processes, but more fundamental reform of our legal and regulatory systems is still necessary. That is what is happening in the context of my Department's regulatory simplification unit.

Deputy Fitzmaurice mentioned other areas that require attention, which they do. Some of that has a European context that we are working on in the context of the EU Presidency. There is also the wider simplification agenda where there are unnecessary layers and fragmented processes that have come from Europe. We are doing what we can achieve within our own legislative framework but there is a need for further reform. My wider point is that taking the 30 actions and interventions and reforms cumulatively is what builds momentum in the infrastructure cycle. That is why in other areas we are simplifying and streamlining the regulatory environment and we are currently working with key regulatory bodies and

Departments to identify such reforms with a particular focus on consenting, permitting and licensing processes across sectors such as the energy, water and transport sectors. This infrastructure is necessary to support the development of all other social and economic infrastructure right across society. It is expected that reforms introduced as part of this process will not simply benefit critical infrastructure projects but will also serve to simplify regulatory processes for infrastructure more generally. If timelines can be reduced and systems paralleled, all projects will move quicker from conception to final delivery, thereby allowing them to open up and be delivered in a more accelerated way for people across the country.

We have taken note of the wider debate this evening and as we look to the coming decade the choices and the reforms we make about infrastructure delivery will determine our economic competitiveness, our climate resilience, housing construction and the quality of life enjoyed by communities across the country. I look forward to working with colleagues as we advance this legislation through the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Critical Infrastructure Bill 2026: Referral to Select Committee

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

That the Bill be referred to the Select Committee on Infrastructure and National Development Plan Delivery pursuant to Standing Orders 103(2)(b) and 188(1).

Question put and agreed to.

Is féidir teacht ar Cheisteanna Scríofa ar www.oireachtas.ie.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 12.03 a.m. go dtí 9 a.m., Dé Céadaoin, an 15 Aibreán 2026.

The Dáil adjourned at 12.03 a.m. until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 15 April 2026.