



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—Neamhcheartaithe
(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters	2
Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate	3
Postal Services	3
Rare Diseases	6
Mental Health Services	9
Proposed Legislation	13
Budget 2027	16
Defence and Neutrality: Motion [Private Members]	19
Message from Select Committee	54
Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions	55
Ceisteanna ó na Comhaltaí Eile - Other Members' Questions	71
Ceisteanna ar Pholasáí nó ar Reachtaíocht - Questions on Policy or Legislation	74
National Treasury Management Agency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026: Second Stage	85
National Treasury Management Agency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026: Referral to Select Committee	123
Criminal Justice (Terrorist Offences) (Amendment) Bill 2025: Report and Final Stages	123
Health (Amendment) (Home Support Providers) Bill 2025: Report and Final Stages	156
Central Bank (Amendment) Bill 2025: Instruction to Committee	160
Sanctions against the State of Israel Bill 2025: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]	171
Evictions and Rent Hikes: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]	173
Defence and Neutrality: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]	180

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 20 Bealtaine 2026

Wednesday, 20 May 2026

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

Paidir agus Machnamh.

Prayer and Reflection.

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters

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

Deputy Robert O'Donoghue - To discuss funding for family resource centre buildings.

Deputies Sorca Clarke, Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Máire Devine - To discuss the proposal to close a ten-bed child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, unit in St. Vincent's Hospital, Fairview, Dublin.

Deputy Michael Collins - To discuss the proposed autism centre in west Cork.

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere - To discuss the VFI-proposed on-trade sustainability scheme as a means of helping rural pubs.

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil - To discuss social infrastructure provision in Kildare North.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae - To discuss the incoming regulations on short-term letting.

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin - To discuss the case of a young woman requiring life-saving treatment in the US.

Deputies Cian O'Callaghan and Barry Heneghan - To discuss safeguarding, governance and resourcing at Belmayne Community Special School.

Deputy Joanna Byrne - To discuss the need for the Drogheda north train station.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne - To discuss reforming the method of funding of local government through commercial rates.

Deputy Pat the Cope Gallagher - To discuss the designation of Burtonport as an approved port for landings by fishing vessels on a Saturday from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon - To discuss the exceptional staffing pressures at a school in County Sligo.

Deputy Louis O'Hara - To discuss the ban on turf cutting in Barroughter, Clonmoylan and Ardraigue bogs in County Galway.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire - To discuss the interception of the Global Sumud aid flotilla and detention of Irish citizens onboard by Israeli forces.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú - To discuss facilitation of a marathon run by two brothers in order to raise money to fight dementia.

Deputy Thomas Gould - To discuss legacy maintenance issues in Cork housing estates.

Deputies Richard Boyd Barrett and Paul Murphy - To discuss the rights and treatment of Oireachtas TV workers.

Deputies Ciarán Ahern, John Lahart, Seán Crowe and Colm Brophy - To discuss the proposed move of the An Post sorting office in Edmondstown to Lucan.

The matters raised by Deputies Ciarán Ahern, John Lahart, Seán Crowe and Colm Brophy, Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin, Sorca Clarke, Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Máire Devine, Michael Healy-Rae, and Peter 'Chap' Cleere have been selected for discussion.

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Postal Services

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: We are here today to register our strong disapproval of the proposed move of an An Post sorting office from Edmondstown to Lucan across the city. This is an issue of serious concern across parties. As the Minister of State can see, there are three Deputies here from the constituency but I know the two other Deputies will have similar feelings about this. This sorting office serves people in Dublin South-West as well as Dublin Rathdown and there are Deputies and councillors in both constituencies who have serious concerns about this.

This sorting office has been a prized local asset for decades. It is an issue as it is a public service in the area. People locally see this as a degradation of services in our area. In practical terms, it would be asking people from Rathfarnham, essentially, and that area to travel across the already congested M50 to pick up parcels in Lucan rather than being able to do it locally. The staff and the local people are really concerned about it. We have heard rumours. We have not heard anything formally from An Post about this yet. The Minister of State has written to me about it and said that this is still a proposal but we would like to get some facts and we would like a meeting with An Post. That is what I am asking for today.

Deputy John Lahart: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for selecting this Topical Issue matter, which should have included our colleague, Deputy Paul Murphy, as well. I ought to say that. The four non-officeholders in Dublin South West come together when there is an issue of serious concern to all of us, and this is one such issue of concern. It is to raise the reported proposal by An Post to close the sorting office at Edmondstown in my own parish and relocate

its operations to a centralised hub in Grange Castle in Lucan. As the Minister of State knows, the proposal has caused significant concern across a wide area of south Dublin, including Rathfarnham, Knocklyon, Ballycullen, Ballyroan, Ballyboden, Butterfield and those areas. The Edmondstown facility currently provides reliable, accessible and community-focused services. It allows residents to easily collect missed deliveries and engage with a local service that is clearly valued and has employed a lot of local people historically.

As was mentioned, the proposed location would require residents to travel across the M50 to Lucan simply to collect a parcel and for many, this is a significant and unreasonable burden. We have been contacted by constituents with no access to private transport or who may have significant needs and are not able to use public transport. Postal workers are also concerned about significantly longer commutes for them. Is the Minister of State aware of the plans? Has any impact assessment been carried out? What engagement has been taking place? Will he intervene to protect local services?

Deputy Seán Crowe: We know that An Post has a plan to relocate these sorting offices. It is not only Edmondstown. It is also talking about closing one in Tallaght and relocating the one in Churchtown, which is in Dublin 14, to Edmondstown. There is a demand in relation to the levels of parcels. It is at Christmas levels at the moment, and it is growing all the time. We accept that there needs to be efficiencies in relation to that but the distance involved is considerable. Travelling from Rathfarnham to Lucan is not straightforward, particularly given chronic traffic congestion across south and west Dublin. Second, public transport options in Rathfarnham and Lucan are limited and indirect for many residents, particularly older people and those with disabilities or those without access to a car. Collecting missed deliveries would become extremely difficult. Many of the people who are impacted by this would have to go the M50 route with all the challenges in relation to that. Part of the challenge is that we have not got the information from An Post of exactly what it is going to do and staff or local customers have not been informed either.

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I thank Deputies Ahern, Lahart and Crowe, and Deputy Murphy as well, for bringing this matter to the Chamber and raising it with me. The Deputies will already be aware of the statutory structure of An Post. It is an independent commercial State body and makes its decisions in this regard. These decisions are operational in nature. I know Deputies are aware of that. As they have outlined, it is an important issue in their area and they are bringing it to the floor of the Dáil. They are seeking particular engagement with An Post. Coming out of this debate today, I will engage with An Post informing it of the concerns Deputies have raised on the floor of the Dáil as public representatives in the area and ask that the relevant management of An Post meet with them to discuss the matter. Obviously, whenever there is change such as this, it is really important there is engagement with the staff and the unions, which An Post has informed me is ongoing. It is really important that is the case but it is also appropriate in this case that it should meet with the Deputies, who have expressed concerns, to discuss the plan and where it is at and how everyone can be consulted and engaged with and that change is managed in a way that works for everyone.

An Post has advised me that it is considering moving the An Post delivery office - not the post office but the delivery office - from Edmondstown, Dublin 16, to a new Dublin west

delivery hub later this year. It has noted as well that it is in consultation with its union and staff and that the company will be working hard to ensure local customers are not disadvantaged. This work includes securing local post offices to enable customers to pick up missed mail. As noted, it is a matter for the company directly as opposed to the Government. Neither I nor the Minister, Deputy O'Donovan, as the shareholders, are in a position to make these decisions. It is an operational matter for it. An Post has noted that it is consolidating its national network of local sorting offices, also known as delivery service units, DSUs, on the basis that it needs larger and purpose fitted premises to manage increased parcel volumes. It is also in the process of hiring and will be hiring 300 additional postmen and women across the country, some of whom will be working in this area to manage the massive growth that we are seeing in volumes.

We are seeing a transformation in relation to postal services. Obviously, the number of letters and how people conduct their lives is changing. It is really important that An Post is in a position to be able to adapt and be at the forefront of that change, particularly being able to accommodate the demand in terms of parcels, online sales and business that is happening, and it has been. It is very much at the forefront of that and is doing a really good job. For it to be able to continue to be a strong company, serving the public of this country into the future, it is really important that we work with it in enabling it to be able to deal with that demand and work with all of its staff in a way that serves the public well.

That does mean, I know, that in many parts of the country - I have the same in my county - they are having to change their sorting offices and to consolidate them into delivery and sorting offices which are capable of meeting that increased demand and the increased demand that will be there in the future.

There has been a lot of change already in relation to this. I note the issues the Deputies have raised. I will facilitate and ask for a meeting with them. From the point of view of the Government, we want An Post to be strong and, in particular, we want its services to the public, whether in relation to letters or parcels, to be effective. We also want the post office network to be maintained. That is why the Government has increased funding to the post office network from €10 million to €15 million this year to make sure we can maintain a strong post office network in the midst of that change.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: We all want to see a strong An Post, but it is important that I also recognise that it is not an entirely commercial body and that it does have a public service mandate as well. There is a lot of uncertainty around the area, whether it is staff or locals, about the future and we are getting a lot of our information second-hand. We would like to see the plan, to the extent that there is one. There are concerns about what we have heard, that collection points might be in local post offices from now on. They are located in SuperValu stores and so on, but they do not have the same opening hours as the sorting office would have. They would not be open before or after work. We would like an end to the uncertainty and to see the plan. We would like to meet with An Post, if the Minister of State can arrange that, please.

Deputy John Lahart: I welcome the fact that the Minister of State will do his best to facilitate engagement directly between An Post and the public representatives who have raised this matter. I also welcome the news about 300 additional postmen and postwomen, some of whom will be employed in the local area. That is really good news. As regards the talk about

dispersing what Edmondstown sorting office does to other local post offices, we have lost Templeogue post office and we lost Rathfarnham post office. They were never replaced despite great efforts by local public representatives. As for the last remaining local post office in this area, in Ballyroan, I do not want to comment on it because I do not own or run it, but just from going in and out and engaging, I just wonder about its capacity to store material. I acknowledge that An Post is growing in terms of deliveries, but this is local, it is a service issue, it is about local people and it is about workers now potentially having to engage in much longer commutes and, certainly, older people and people with disabilities having to engage in cruel commutes just to collect parcels.

Deputy Seán Crowe: My only experience is going into the Tallaght sorting office, and I have never gone in without other people being there. There are always queues there, which highlights the fact that it is being used. We are told that there is a plan in place. We do not know what the plan is so we are looking for information about that plan. At the end of the day, we need to know where the parcels will go, if they are not delivered to households. A lot of people living in apartments cannot get access to their parcels and so on. Where do they have to go? What is proposed in relation to the location in Lucan is unsuitable. We are looking for a compromise on that. There is also the issue of staff. Most of the staff live locally and are from the locality, whether it is Edmondstown, Tallaght or some of the other areas. Again, this will move people, create extra traffic and so on. What is being talked about is unsuitable.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: The most important engagement here will be between An Post and its staff in relation to the proposal and the management of that, and taking on board any concerns that are there. It is important that that continues and is detailed and respectful of everyone. The Deputies, as public representatives, are raising how this issue will impact on the wider public and the importance of staff engagement. I will request that a meeting be organised with them to discuss these issues further.

We all know and accept, I think, that significant change is happening. It is important that An Post is in a position to respond to that, has the capacity to deal with it and is at the forefront of that change to ensure our commercial semi-State body is at the heart of the postal service and commercial delivery in the future, also because it has a public service remit. Considering how the public is served and considering letter delivering capacity, we need to continue to have a good postal letter service in the future. With An Post at the forefront of the online commercial side, it can also make sure that it will be in a position to provide the best possible letter delivery service because of the financial strength of the company.

I thank the Deputies for raising this matter. I will certainly take it up and have that meeting facilitated. I hope, in terms of their input and particularly the ongoing appropriate engagement between An Post and the staff, that this is stepped out in a way that works for the staff and particularly for the public, whom we all want to see properly served in their local communities.

Rare Diseases

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Since this relates to an individual, I am conscious that we should be mindful of their privacy and their family.

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin: I once more raise the case of a young Arklow Gaelscoil teacher, Éimear Byrne, with the Minister of State and the Government. As the Minister of State knows, Éimear urgently needs life-saving treatment in the US that costs €600,000. Recently, Éimear received devastating news. Doctors discovered three more aneurysms and she now needs a third open-heart surgery procedure. This one is even more complex and urgent, so time is critical and the family and the community of south Wicklow need and want the Government to intervene to get Éimear to the USA as soon as possible. Life-saving treatment can be done there immediately if the money is available. I plead with the Government again to make an intervention under the exceptional circumstances clause, which does exist.

Considering the complexity of Éimear's condition and the risks involved, the surgery needs to be carried out urgently in a specialised clinic such as Johns Hopkins in the US, which has the necessary medical experience and the facilities to treat patients like Éimear. Surgery in this hospital will reduce the rate of mortality during the procedure and reduce potentially life-altering complications such as a second stroke. The operation and rehabilitation in America will give Éimear the best chance of survival so she can live a long, happy and fulfilling life and continue educating the children of Arklow in their native language, as she loves to do.

In terms of fund-raising, Éimear states:

I have been looking for help with the Government for funding since October 2025 and to no avail. This is why my family have had to look for community support by setting up a GoFundMe page.

There is a GoFundMe page for Éimear Byrne in Arklow. Dozens of fund-raising events around the town over recent months have so far raised €230,000 of the required €600,000. People had to dig deep because the Government just was not doing anything. Last Friday, I attended an event in Pearse Park, Arklow. It made the Guinness Book of Records. There were 254 people patting each other on the back as a reference to the community having Éimear's back because the Government has not had her back to date but the community has. Local people have been tremendous, absolutely inspiring. However, they can only be expected to do so much. They have done their bit.

Will the Department of Health and the Government now do their part and make up the shortfall for an Irish citizen in her time of need for life-saving surgery? We got answers about the treatment abroad scheme. I realise that the treatment abroad scheme covers only the European Union and the European Economic Area. I know that. However, there is the facility for the Department to fund treatment in the US under exceptional circumstances if it cannot be done in the EU, which is on guidance from Éimear's consultants. The Government already funds patients to travel to the US for specialised medical treatment but on an exceptional basis. An exceptional basis, as the Minister of State knows, can be made under three specific conditions. There is the high-cost drugs treatment protocol. Second, there is the out-of-State policy application. Third, is the exceptional circumstances clause, which is what I am asking about. Patients have historically received and secured funding to go to US-based medical centres for rare conditions and for extremely complex procedures when an Irish public consultant provides strong clinical justification that this care is essential and proven. Éimear's case fits the criteria. I have gone through it with HSE personnel.

It fits the criteria. All I want to know is whether the Government will step in. It is small money in the greater scheme of things in terms of expenditure. This has to be done as a matter of urgency. I hope the Minister of State and the Department will have a positive answer for us, the people of Arklow and the family.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): I thank Deputy Ó Súilleabháin for raising this matter, which I am taking on behalf of the Minister for Health, Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill. The Minister is aware of the case the Deputy referred to and acknowledges the very difficult circumstances outlined by him and how difficult the situation described is for this young teacher and her family.

In relation to the EU treatment abroad scheme, the HSE operates the scheme for people entitled under EU Regulation No. 883/2004. The Minister for Health has no role in directing treatment. Section 6 of the Health Service Executive (Governance) Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The treatment abroad scheme is a consultant-led scheme and allows for a public consultant based in Ireland to refer a public patient who is normally resident in Ireland for treatment in the public healthcare system of another European Union or European Economic Area member state, the UK or Switzerland. Under the EU regulations and guidelines, the EU treatment abroad scheme provides for the cost of approved public treatments in another EU-EEA member state, the UK or Switzerland, through the issue of form S2, where the treatment is among the benefits provided by the Irish legislation and where it is not available in Ireland, or not available within the time normally necessary for obtaining it in Ireland, taking account of the patient's current state of health and the probable course of the disease. It is important to note that there is no statutory framework for referral of public patients outside the EU-EEA member states, the UK or Switzerland, or for the funding of any such treatment.

The HSE has informed officials in the Department of Health that it received an application under the treatment abroad scheme, seeking funding of treatment in the USA, in this case on 1 April 2026 and that it has engaged with the applicant and her family regarding this matter. The HSE has advised that at this time the applicant did not meet the criteria of the treatment abroad scheme, which the Deputy mentioned, on two different grounds, namely, that the treatment sought was not to be provided within the EU-EEA, the UK or Switzerland, and she was not a public patient. The applicant is attending a consultant in a private capacity. The HSE treatment abroad scheme has advised that it suggested to the applicant's referring consultant that he engage with the relevant European reference network, ERN, the European reference network on rare multisystemic vascular diseases. The ERN enables specialists in Europe to discuss cases of patients affected by rare, low-prevalence and complex diseases, providing advice on the most appropriate diagnosis and the best treatment available. Ireland is an active participant in ERNs, with 18 recognised centres involved across a range of networks. Engagement with ERNs is an important step in ensuring that all appropriate EU-based expertise and treatment options have been explored.

I assure the Deputy that officials in the Department of Health will continue to engage with the HSE to seek further updates that all avenues within Ireland and the EU that may be open to the young woman in question and her family have been fully explored in response to the very

difficult circumstances outlined by him. I will also take on board and discuss with the Minister the clause the Deputy raised in relation to exceptional circumstances which fall outside the scope of the current support that can be provided and to see whether that can be looked at as a matter of urgency.

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin: With respect, that is very similar to a stock answer the family has been given over the past few months. I will not accept the answer and I know Eímea, her family and the community in south Wicklow will not accept this answer from the Government or the Department. It is a stock answer and it is simply not good enough. This involves tiny money. The Minister of State said I referenced the EU and the EEA. I did not. I know that the treatment abroad scheme has certain confinement. What I am talking about is the exceptional clause circumstances for going to the USA. That clause exists, and it is within the power of the Minister to implement it. That can happen if the will is there. I am just not sure the will is there and I want to know if it is on the part of the Department.

I am somewhat reassured that the Minister of State indicated that it was at a particular time that the applicant did not meet the criteria and that she will continue to engage with the HSE. I would hate to think the door is closed on this because it is very much not closed. This is time sensitive and I am pleading with the Minister to act on it. The family and community are also pleading with her to do so. They cannot waste more time waiting. Who knows when they are next, if they wake up the following morning. I will not embarrass the Government by going through a list of projects in the country, or even in County Wicklow, where State money has been wasted. This is most definitely pin money to the Government, which could save someone's life and make a massive difference. I plead with the Minister to use the power she has to see that this can be done as soon as possible.

Deputy Mary Butler: I reiterate that the HSE has advised that it suggested that the applicant's referring consultant engage with the relevant ERN, the European reference network on rare multisystemic vascular diseases. The ERN enables specialists in Europe to discuss cases of patients affected by rare, low-prevalence and complex diseases, providing advice on the most appropriate diagnosis and the best treatment available. Ireland is an active participant in ERN, with 18 recognised centres involved across a range of networks. Engagement with ERNs is an important step in ensuring that all appropriate EU-based expertise and treatment options have been explored.

That said, the Department recognises, and I recognise, having listened to the Deputy, how difficult this individual case is for the applicant and her family. I assure the Deputy that officials in the Department of Health will continue to engage with the HSE and seek updates to ensure that every possible avenue within Ireland and the EU that may be open to the applicant and her family has been fully explored. As I said, I will bring to the attention of the Minister the exceptional of circumstances clause. I have no doubt she is well aware of it, but I will take that to her today and see if any further supports can be provided.

Mental Health Services

Deputy Sorca Clarke: There is a deeply concerning and worrying direction of travel here. We have around 50% of the recommended beds nationally for CAMHS. That recommendation

is contained in the Department's own mental health strategy. We know that CAMHS is already operating at half the capacity that experts said was needed almost 20 years ago. Against that backdrop, the proposed closure of the CAMHS unit in St. Vincent's Hospital in Fairview makes absolutely no sense. Quite frankly, it is alarming. That the CAMHS unit in Linn Dara is due to reopen after four years being closed due to staff shortages is of course welcome. The problem, however, is that the proposed closure of the function of CAMHS in St. Vincent's Hospital in Fairview is being done to staff Linn Dara. Instead of genuinely expanding services, the Department is effectively robbing Peter to pay Paul. I know the Minister of State will tell me about the new children's hospital but there is no timeframe for that, and nor have the 20 beds been budgeted for. The Fairview unit is operational, staffed and delivering care. The families know it and they trust the service there. Yet, there seems to be an intention to redeploy staff from Fairview to Linn Dara. I am informed that so far only two members of staff have agreed to this. We must also remember that St Vincent's Hospital is a section 38 hospital, while Linn Dara is directly managed by the HSE, and those workers cannot be compelled to move. At a time when recruitment and retention is already at crisis point, this approach is reckless.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Linn Dara closed in 2022 for what was supposed to be four months. It has still not reopened with the beds that are due to open again. That was a crisis at the time and it has been a crisis since. It is welcome that the facility is to reopen but will it reopen with a full complement of staff? When Linn Dara opened, the problem from day 1 was that there was never a full complement of staff. Then there were staff changes because of the pressures that were put on staff. The unit eventually closed because it was no longer safe as there was not a full complement of staff. Linn Dara is needed, St. Vincent's Hospital is needed and the children's hospital, which is also in the area, is needed. Nobody is saying that they should not all be open.

We know we have a crisis in this country and in this city. We need all of those services. The fact that one service is closing to facilitate the opening of another is absolutely ridiculous. We need to know about the planning and where the funding for the CAMHS services in the children's hospital is going to come from because in two years' time we do not want Linn Dara to close again to facilitate the children's hospital.

Deputy Máire Devine: This decision is inconceivable. As a long-time member of the Psychiatric Nurses Association - I stopped nursing at the last election - I am well aware of the shortages on the ground and of the crisis management we are forced to do - dissipating some of the therapeutics and trying to keep patients safe. It is inexplicable that it has been decided to shut the section 38 and to transfer everybody to Linn Dara and that it will be happy days. That is not going to happen and it will not be as smooth as people think it will be. From talking to nurses on the ground, who are my colleagues, two are in favour moving while the other 20 fear they will be lost to the adult services because they are desperate. We are short 6,000 nurses across the Twenty-six Counties. They will be lost to the adult services as will their expertise with young people. There is also the waiting list. We know we have failed in terms of CAMHS. We also know we have failed our children in the past. Look at Kerry and at lots of issues. Linn Dara closed in 2018. I was on the Joint Committee on the Future of Mental Health Care with former Senator, Joan Freeman, and we visited it. It opened again and then it closed again. I would like clarification.

Deputy Mary Butler: I thank all three Deputies for raising this really important issue. First, I want to make absolutely clear that neither my Department nor the HSE is closing any beds. In fact, this year, in budget 2026, I have provided over €4 million to open 18 HSE CAMHS beds. I have allocated €2.7 million to open the first phase of the new acute CAMHS wing of the national children's hospital and I have also allocated over €1.3 million to hire the staff to reopen 11 CAMHS beds in the state-of-the-art Linn Dara campus. As a result of this funding, the HSE has made the sensible decision to discontinue the purchase of ten CAMHS beds from a voluntary provider, St. Vincent's Hospital, Fairview. These are not HSE beds but these are beds within the HSE that the HSE has been buying as additional capacity while the Linn Dara beds have been out of operation due to safe staffing.

In 2025, the HSE child and youth mental health office completed a national review of HSE-funded CAMHS inpatient services focused on referrals, admissions, diagnoses, staffing and bed capacity. The review recommended the development of a national commissioning model and service specification in line with, and complementary to, the new CAMHS operational guidelines to ensure consistent access, service delivery and care standards across all inpatient units.

The report made specific findings, which none of the Deputies referred to, regarding the current inpatient unit at St. Vincent's Hospital, Fairview: first, the unit's restricted age cohort as it only accepts 15 to 17-year olds for admissions; second, the lack of an appropriate eating disorder pathway and no out-of-hours or weekend admissions; third, concerns raised by the Mental Health Commission regarding governance; fourth, staffing constraints, including reliance on a single full-time consultant dedicated to the unit; and, very importantly, unsuitable physical infrastructure where the current building is no longer fit for purpose. I understand the two floors above the CAMHS unit in St. Vincent's Hospital, Fairview, are derelict or uninhabited.

As these limitations result in inequitable access and service inconsistency when compared to other CAMHS inpatient units nationally, the HSE decided to discontinue the use of the beds at St. Vincent's Hospital, Fairview, and to streamline the provision of HSE CAMHS inpatient beds across the Dublin region in line with the recommendations from the review report. Consequently, CAMHS inpatient beds will be provided through an expanded service at Linn Dara in Cherry Orchard and the newly commissioned beds in the Children's Hospital Ireland, CHI, campus to best meet the future needs of the HSE Dublin North East, HSE Dublin Midlands and HSE Dublin South East health regions.

The HSE aims to reopen the 11 beds in Linn Dara by the end of September and has therefore advised St. Vincent's Hospital, Fairview, it will no longer need the ten beds from the date it was paying for privately. There will be, of course, flexibility on both sides in relation to this timeline to ensure no reductions in overall capacity. Importantly, this approach will place all CAMHS inpatient units under a single, standardised HSE clinical governance framework and address current service limitations.

There will be no staff redundancies arising from this decision. The HSE expects the transition to create opportunities for the experienced and dedicated staff working in St. Vincent's within the newly commissioned CAMHS inpatient services at Linn Dara and CHI. I want to acknowledge the work done by the Psychiatric Nurses Association working in St.

Vincent's. It is of course a personal decision for staff whether or not they wish to transfer to either the new hospital or to Linn Dara.

I was surprised to find the reconfiguration of beds was the main theme at this year's PNA annual conference. We face many challenges in our public mental health services and I did not expect keeping ten voluntary non-HSE CAMHS beds with the limitations I have described to be the key concern of the body for a profession for which I have the upmost admiration and respect.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I have read some statements on this issue which are quite frankly very concerning such as "It will reopen if staff can be recruited". That is literally the job of the Minister of State and her senior Minister. I do not think it is reasonable to expect anybody whose child needs a CAMHS bed to accept that the Ministers may have woken up and suddenly realised they are in government. This is actually their job. Families across the State have endured scandal after scandal when it comes to CAMHS. The Psychiatric Nurses Association described the proposal as inconceivable and I agree. I ask the Minister of State to please to look at this. There is something fundamentally wrong when the State is reliant on beds in a hospital that is not even completed.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: As a TD in Dublin South-Central where Linn Dara is based I welcome the fact it is going to open but it is not additionality. This is something that was closed in 2018 and 2022. It was supposed to be for three or four months. Here we are how many years later? It is four years later and the Minister of State says it is an expanded service. It is not expanded - it is a reinstatement of service. If it was expanded, the Minister of State would be announcing 20 extra beds in Linn Dara or she would announce the capacity would increase based on St. Vincent's. That is not the case.

Deputy Máire Devine: Respectfully, this is not a sensible decision being made by the HSE. The Minister of State's response will be used in the WRC. The PNA is to meet and to discuss this with the HSE on 24 or 25 May to try to get a resolution. Keep the ten Fairview beds open and keep Linn Dara and the 20 beds in the National Children's Hospital. She should engage. There has been no engagement with the PNA or its members who are the experts on the ground.

Deputy Mary Butler: There has been.

Deputy Máire Devine: There has been very minimal engagement. The section 38 thing is bit muddying the waters a little bit. We are looking at the number of beds and services available in totality.

Deputy Mary Butler: My team spoke to the PNA in advance of the conference and indeed spoke to some of the nurses in St. Vincent's about this change. If anything the nurses' main concern was the way in which the decision was communicated to the staff at St. Vincent's by their CEO, by email on a Friday evening with no detail about the opportunities to transfer. That was completely wrong. This is no way to treat hard-working and dedicated staff who deserve our respect and to be communicated with properly about such a significant change.

By way of background context, CAMHS inpatient bed capacity is 72 beds nationally but due to a range of issues, there are 45 beds in operation. As of 12 May 2026, the waiting list nationally to access CAMHS inpatient units was one. Of the available 45 inpatient beds, 36 were occupied on 12 May, leaving nine beds available to accommodate an admission. It is important to stress that there has not been an occasion since the reduction in operational beds nationally to 45 when all available beds have been occupied.

I am really concerned, especially about Deputy Clarke's narrative. There is a reason this has been looked at and she did not refer to that at all, that is, the unit's restricted age cohort of 15 to 17 years; the fact a child can only be referred to the unit on a Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; the lack of an appropriate eating disorder pathway; the concerns raised by the Mental Health Commission; staffing constraints, including reliance on a single full-time consultant; and, most importantly, unsuitable physical infrastructure where the current building is no longer fit for purpose.

I am trying to open public beds here. I am trying to stop spending money on private beds. I look forward to staff being hired. I hope some of the staff will move across to the excellent Linn Dara site. Please God, we will get the beds open as soon as possible.

Proposed Legislation

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: We should all recognise the value of short-term letting to rural economies. Of course, the Government should also recognise this. I appreciate the work that has been done in this regard by the Ministers involved. There are 1,800 short-term lets in Kerry worth over €17 million to the county's economy. On the Wild Atlantic Way between Kerry and Donegal, there are over 6,800 short-term lets all in rural counties across the west coast, which is worth €256 million to our economy.

Over the weekend, the Minister, Deputy James Browne, stated that regulations around short-term letting will be among the most stringent in the EU. I have worries about exactly what that means. I do not want it to seem or to be that this Government is attacking people involved in short-term lettings because that is not what we should be doing. Of course, we should be doing everything we can to provide housing but in doing that, we have to recognise that people who have been involved in short-term lets for years and years are providing a service in the local economy. They are keeping the local shop, the local pub and the local restaurant going.

The register is very welcome. The industry welcomes it but the delays and the lack of details and clarity are not helpful. There is nobody involved in short-term letting who says they do not want a register; that is not the case. The whole issue of planning is terrifying business people who operate in the sector and it should not be so. Of course, for people who are established and have been there for a number of years there should be a grandfather clause in place. Their planning permission should be the fact that they have been at it for a certain number of years. That is the answer to that and it would tick the box on that issue.

I have no sympathy for a person who comes along now and wants to buy a house here in Dublin, in Kerry or anywhere and they want to change that house and make it into a short-term let. Of course, they should have the opportunity. They can apply for planning permission. They can go through all the rigours that we put in place and I have no problem with that because

we want to stop accommodation going out of long-term residential into short-term letting. However, the poor person who has been at it all along should really be left alone.

My main questions for the Minister would be as follows: what does he mean by the most stringent regulations in Europe? I see that as an upset and, being mild about it, a worry to the people involved in that business. Will the Department of housing commit to publishing a national planning statement, NPs, for short-term letting as soon as possible to be helpful to the sector? Will the Minister ensure that planning exemptions will be in place for those who have been operating for seven years or more? Most importantly, will those properties be deemed planning compliant by having a grandfather clause? We have to do something like that to protect the people. What about someone with a property at the back of their house, farm or wherever who was never going to change that from short-term letting to long-term letting? Instead of helping we would actually be hurting because we would be taking a viable business out of a community.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor): I thank the Deputy for highlighting this important issue. I am taking this on behalf the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment has drafted the general scheme of the short-term letting and tourism, STLT, Bill in full alignment with the EU short-term rental regulation, which is what the Deputy is talking about. We have a collaborative approach between enterprise and tourism. The introduction of the STLT Bill will provide a more effective legal and administrative basis to regulate short-term lettings.

The Bill, when enacted, will provide a statutory basis for the introduction of a register for all short-term lettings in Ireland, which will be implemented and managed by Fáilte Ireland. All short-term letting accommodation providers will be required to register with Fáilte Ireland. As part of the registration process, accommodation providers will need to confirm that they are planning compliant, one of the issues the Deputy mentioned.

The Government has approved a threshold-based approach to generally preclude new planning permissions for short-term lets in larger towns and cities where, often, long-term residential housing need is significant. Further to this, the Cabinet committee on housing has proposed that the threshold be set at towns and cities with a population of more than 20,000, amounting to 25 towns based on the most recent census of population. It is intended that accommodation providers in all other locations outside the largest towns and cities will be able to avail of an extended period to meet planning compliance requirements.

To ensure that there is a clear view, at national level and local authority level, as to the overall policy approach to determining planning applications for short-term lets, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is currently finalising a national planning statement on short-term letting to supplement and support the introduction of the STLT Bill. The NPS will ensure a transparent, consistent overall policy approach, both nationally and at local authority level, to determining planning applications for short-term letting that will complement and support the introduction of the STLT Bill. It considers various factors such as existing planning legislation, the location and potential benefits of the proposed short-term letting property and the overarching aim to balance housing need with the potential impact on tourism and economic development. The NPS is being finalised as a priority and a

draft will be brought to Cabinet shortly. That was one of the Deputy's questions. I will go back to the Minister today to find out when this will be brought to Cabinet and signed off.

Tourism is important to the economy and the Government is mindful of concerns in both rural areas and in major tourism regions where short-term lettings provide much-needed accommodation for visitors. However, meeting local housing need across Ireland is a critical consideration and Government must use every lever available to assist in providing homes for our people, including returning properties to the long-term residential market.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I acknowledge that the minimum figure of 20,000 for towns was a put in place. I had lobbied strongly for that because we want to protect the tourism capital of the western world, which, as everybody knows, is Killarney, County Kerry and there is no doubt about that. However, I am worried about people in towns and areas with a population of less than 20,000 where the planning guidelines will be put in place for short-term letting who have not been operating for more than seven years. The people need to see as soon as possible what will be put in place. The can has been kicked down the road a number of times and I do not want to be fighting about that. All I am saying is that people need clarity.

We are very clear on what we are going to be saying to people: we do not want to hound or persecute fine respectable people who are operating very nice businesses, who are paying tax and who have invested heavily in their homes, in their accommodations, specifically for short-term lets. Even where they are located would not blend in with long-term letting because it could literally be putting two families up on top of each other in the same yard. An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach has them in his constituency, as do the Minister of State and other Deputies.

They know what I am talking about. At the same time, there is the whole question for the Government of whether it wants to stop places from having any long-term residential accommodation because everything would be short-term. Of course, we want balance. However, we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. We need to make sure we are protecting established businesses and try to give clarity as soon as possible, rather than upsetting people.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: This is an important matter. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage has worked closely with the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, and is committed to developing a fair and balanced approach to the short-term letting question, which is crucial. As the Deputy said, as a proud Kerryman, he has always highlighted the needs in this area. I absolutely agree. It is about all of the different Departments working together. I believe this will have a good outcome.

With the approach outlined earlier, the need for rental housing stock is being balanced with the need to protect rural and regional tourism and jobs, which are important. The long-term development of tourism requires that an appropriate equilibrium is achieved in the short-term and long-term rental sector. Tourism is very important to the economy. The Government is mindful of concerns in both rural regions and major tourism regions, where short-term lettings provide much-needed accommodation for visitors, as the Deputy mentioned. However, addressing Ireland's housing needs is a priority, and the Government must use every lever available, including returning some short-term letting properties to the housing market, which

may include longer-term rentals. The approach to be taken in the STLT Bill, as well as in the national planning statement, will balance greater housing supply with the need to protect rural and regional tourism jobs.

I again thank the Deputy for raising this very important issue. I am glad to provide him with as much information as I can. He is right that we need to get this finalised. We need to have the draft brought to Cabinet as soon as possible. I will go back to the Minister for housing. Clarification is crucial to provide information on what is happening for everyone. I will do that.

Budget 2027

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere: The Vintners' Federation of Ireland, VFI, AGM took place last week at Mount Wolseley in my constituency. The message coming directly from publicans is that rural pubs are under enormous pressure. Closures are accelerating year after year. Since 2005, more than 2,200 pubs have closed across the country. More worrying again is that the rate of closure is increasing, with approximately 128 pubs closing every year.

We have to be honest about what that means for rural Ireland. When a pub closes in a village or small town, we are not simply losing a business premises or a commercial enterprise; we are losing a meeting place and a venue for traditional music, fundraisers, sports clubs and community gatherings. In many communities, we are losing the last remaining social space where people can come together. For older people in particular, the local pub often acts as an important defence against loneliness and isolation. In many areas, it is one of the last functioning community hubs left standing. Rural pubs are not just businesses. They are part of the social infrastructure of rural Ireland.

Despite that role, many publicans face what the VFI describes as an existential threat to their survival. The cost pressures they are dealing with are extraordinary. Electricity costs have risen by 70% in the past five years, alongside insurance and every other operational cost facing small businesses. It is important to note that the restoration of the 9% VAT rate for food service is very welcome and will undoubtedly provide essential support for many hospitality businesses. However, the reality is that many smaller rural pubs do not serve food and, therefore, cannot meaningfully benefit from that measure. In fact, the VFI estimates that two thirds of smaller rural pubs are excluded from the benefit of the reduced VAT because they are traditional drinks-only establishments.

That is why the VFI proposal for the on-trade sustainability scheme deserves serious consideration ahead of budget 2027. It is a targeted, capped and structured tax credit proposal that is aimed specifically at supporting smaller pubs that are struggling with rising costs and declining viability. The proposal will provide support linked to verified draught product supply costs, with a cap of €20,000 per premises, ensuring the support is proportionate and targeted towards smaller operators. Importantly, there is a precedent for this type of support within Government policy. We already provide tax credits to support film and television production, digital gaming and unscripted television production.

This is about rural sustainability, protecting local employment, supporting tourism and maintaining social cohesion in communities that are already feeling under pressure from depopulation and loss of services. The OECD recently highlighted the importance of

community infrastructure and social spaces in sustaining rural communities and local economies. The GAA has warned about the erosion of rural social infrastructure and specifically identified the loss of pubs as contributing to declining community vibrancy. This issue goes well beyond one sector. It is fundamentally about whether we are serious about protecting rural Ireland and the communities that sustain it. Will the Government seriously examine the VFI's proposed on-trade sustainability scheme ahead of budget 2027 and recognise that protecting rural pubs is ultimately about protecting rural communities?

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I thank the Deputy for raising this important issue and highlighting the role that pubs play in Irish life and culture by providing a central hub and meeting place in towns and villages across the country. The Government's commitment to the sector was most recently demonstrated by the reduction in the VAT rate to 9%, recognising that the sector is highly labour-intensive. It forms a key part of the domestic economy and is expected to support over 150,000 jobs across the country. We can help to keep the doors open and the jobs going by providing clarity and certainty for these hospitality businesses.

I assure the Deputy that while the Department of Finance receives pre-budget submissions from a wide range of stakeholders in advance of each budget, all are given consideration as part of the annual policy cycle. I am aware that the Department has received and acknowledged a submission from the VFI outlining a proposal for a payable tax credit for pubs. The proposed payable credit would be linked to the number of draught product kegs purchased by a business, and it would be subject to a per-premises cap of €20,000.

Proposals for new tax expenditures are examined by reference to the Department's tax expenditure guidelines, which outline the Government's approach to how tax expenditures are best used, noting that these narrow the tax base and how they should be evaluated. A number of issues at a European level will need to be taken into account during these deliberations, including state aid requirements. Measures that confer a selective advantage on a specific sector have the potential to constitute state aid and, therefore, could not be introduced unless compliant with an existing framework or by undertaking a full notification process.

It should be noted that the tax credits available for film and digital games are all approved state aids, largely under the terms set out in the EU's Communication from the Commission on State aid for films and other audiovisual works, which would not have relevance to the on-trade sector. This is what the Minister for Finance has highlighted. Additionally, any tax credit given to rural pubs, or, indeed, to all pubs, and which is based on the supplies of alcohol products to those pubs, would have to be considered in the context of the alcohol structures directive if its effect, in practice, were to give relief from the rate of alcohol excise paid on alcohol products. This directive lays down a harmonised approach to excise duties on alcohol in the EU. It defines alcoholic beverages and sets out the basis on which excise duties on such products are to be established by member states, as well as the conditions for the application of reduced rates and special regimes. These are the issues Ministers are looking at.

It is worth noting that there has been no general increase in excise duty rates for alcohol since 2014. While the retail price of beer has risen over that period, the excise duty has remained unchanged and, therefore, the total tax as a percentage of the retail price of each pint is lower than it was more than a decade ago.

I assure the Deputy that the Government is conscious of the challenges facing all businesses in the current economic climate. The Cost of Business Advisory Forum is working to look at the structural issues that are driving up costs and the steps that could be taken to mitigate them. It is important to note that we understand the overheads and the way costs have risen for businesses.

10 o'clock

It is also important to highlight that a number of existing tax supports are available to all business, including the on-trade environment, to encourage investment in the economy, particularly in indigenous SMEs. These supports include the employment investment incentive, the start-up relief for entrepreneurs and the start-up capital investment. A range of direct expenditure supports are available to business and details can be found online at the national enterprise hub. Notwithstanding what I have said, the matters raised in the Deputy's submission will continue to inform ongoing policy consideration in the context of the budget. It is with the Minister.

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere: I appreciate the response but this issue requires a stronger sense of urgency from the Government because the trend lines are moving in the wrong direction. We are seeing more than 120 pubs close every year in this country. Once these businesses disappear from rural communities, they very rarely come back. What concerns many publicans is that although Government policy increasingly recognises the cultural and economic importance of pubs in theory, that recognition is not translated into practical support measures that reflect the realities they face on the ground.

The VFI proposal is a measured and targeted one. It is capped and linked to verified supply costs. It is focused on the on-trade sector and particularly on smaller rural pubs. Importantly, it seeks to support those traditional pubs that do not benefit from the reduced 9% VAT rate because they are not food businesses.

There is a broader point here about parity of esteem. The State rightly supports sectors viewed as culturally or economically valuable through targeted tax credits and incentives. It is done for film, gaming and television production. Surely there is a strong argument for supporting one of the most recognisable parts of Irish social and cultural life, particularly when it plays such an important role in sustaining rural communities. Ultimately, this is not just about pubs; it is about whether rural Ireland continues to have a place where people can gather, connect and maintain community life. Once those spaces are gone, the social consequences are very difficult to reverse.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: What the Deputy has spoken about is really concerning. He can be assured I will go back to the Minister for Finance. I am aware of the importance of local pubs to Irish culture and the Irish economy, particularly in local and rural areas, which we are both from.

Recent years have been challenging to the hospitality sector as a whole, particularly through the period of Covid restrictions. We saw huge changes then. However, those years also demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of businesses. Premises enhanced their outdoor areas and introduced food offerings. It was a big thing to see all the new outdoor areas.

Premises adapted to changes in socialising behaviour by introducing new ranges of non-alcoholic drinks, for example, embracing coffee culture.

Like all businesses, trade is facing challenges from increased costs. The Government is taking steps to alleviate these challenges, primarily through work co-ordinated by the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment on the cost of business and an action plan for competitiveness and productivity. It is important that the Government support businesses, particularly indigenous SMEs, in all sectors of the economy. Actions have already been taken to support the hospitality sector, for example, through the VAT reduction to 9%, which will come into effect from July and will be of huge benefit to pubs selling food and hot drinks. The Government is also prioritising measures to help businesses and households with increased energy costs arising from the conflict in the Middle East. This has included reductions in the price of diesel and petrol, extension of the fuel allowance season and measures to support hauliers, bus passengers, operators, farmers, agricultural contractors and fisheries. The Government will continue this focus on supporting businesses across Ireland, including pubs, as we develop options for budget 2027.

The Department has received and acknowledged the submission from the Vintners Federation of Ireland outlining a proposal for an on-trade sustainability scheme in budget 2027. I thank the Deputy for highlighting this. He can be assured I will go back to the Minister for Finance to highlight his concerns.

Defence and Neutrality: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy Brian Stanley: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- Irish Neutrality has been central to the sovereignty and independence of the State, that it was first enunciated by Theobald Wolfe Tone and upheld by successive generations;
- despite being a small country, our neutrality has enabled Ireland to play a positive role in international affairs;
- the Defence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 1960 encompassed neutrality and the requirement known as the "Triple Lock" which means that deployment of Defence Force overseas requires the authorisation of the United Nations (UN), Government and the Dáil;
- the Triple Lock is central to the policy of neutrality;
- the failure of the first referendums to have the Nice and Lisbon Treaties passed was due to concerns by the electorate on neutrality;
- to assuage those concerns, the Triple Lock and Neutrality were enshrined in solemn National Declarations that were attached to both treaties;
- the two treaties were only endorsed by the electorate in second referendums due to these solemn national declarations and guarantees included in them;

- any move by Government to overturn these commitments without a referendum would be a denial of democracy;
- successive opinion polls have demonstrated that the majority of the electorate want our policy of neutrality retained;
- being neutral does not in any way inhibit increasing the capacity and capabilities of the Defence Forces; and
- currently there is no upper limit on the number of Defence Force personnel that can be deployed for the purpose of overseas humanitarian issues;

calls on the Government to:

- uphold the policy of Neutrality and the Triple Lock as set out in the Defence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 1960 and the solemn national declarations attached to the Nice and Lisbon Treaties;
- recognise that these commitments regarding the Triple Lock and Neutrality can only be changed or amended by a majority of the electorate in a referendum;
- recognise that the triple lock and neutrality are intrinsically linked;
- strengthen the States policy of Neutrality by bringing forward a referendum to enshrine neutrality in the constitution;
- work with other neutral and non-aligned countries to reform and re-establish the primacy of the UN as the forum to uphold international law and for resolving international disputes and conflicts;
- abide by the principal of multilateralism and not allow the State to become part of any regional military alliance; and
- halt plans to progress the Defence (Amendment) Bill 2025 and the provisions in it to abolish the Triple Lock and Neutrality.

Where is the Minister for Defence?

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I am taking this today.

Deputy Brian Stanley: No disrespect to you-----

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I know.

Deputy Brian Stanley: -----but the Minister for Defence should be here. There is legislation planned to go before the Dáil to abolish the triple lock and, we contend, to abolish neutrality. The fact the Minister is not here is an absolute disgrace. It shows total disrespect for the Parliament.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: The Minister is coming. I am taking the first slot and then the Minister will be in later.

Deputy Brian Stanley: That is okay.

The whole issue of Irish neutrality has been central to our sovereignty as a State. As a member of the national defence and security committee, I am more concerned about what is happening now than I was in the past.

Despite being a small country, our neutrality has enabled Ireland to play a positive role in international affairs from the 1950s and 1960s to the present day. The Defence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1960 encompassed neutrality and the requirement known as the triple lock, which means the Defence Forces cannot be deployed overseas without the authorisation of the UN, the Government and the Dáil. The triple lock has been central to neutrality, despite denials from the Government. The failure of the first referendums on the Nice and Lisbon treaties showed how important it is to the Irish people. Initially, they were not passed due to concerns about neutrality. To assuage those concerns, the triple lock and neutrality were enshrined in solemn national declarations that were attached to both treaties and they were only successful on the second occasion because of that.

Any move by the Government to abolish or undermine those commitments is a denial of democracy and, I believe, is open to a legal challenge. On top of that, I say to Deputy Murnane O'Connor as a Fianna Fáil Minister of State that successive opinion polls have demonstrated that the vast majority of Irish people, despite all the propaganda that is being shoved down their necks, support retaining the policy of neutrality. The policy of neutrality does not inhibit or stop the Government or State from increasing the capacity and capabilities of the Defence Forces, or from modernising them. The triple lock does not restrict the number of Defence Forces personnel that can be deployed overseas, despite propaganda to the contrary, for the purposes of rescue and humanitarian or emergency missions without a UN mandate. The Minister confirmed that publicly in the committee to me recently.

I turn to the issue of the United Nations. There has been a lot of misinformation suggesting that only the Security Council can veto peacekeeping missions. Of course, the General Assembly can do it as well and there is precedent here. Ireland would not have got a rotating seat on the Security Council six or seven years ago but for the fact we are neutral. One of the lobbying points to convince developing countries to support us at the General Assembly was exactly the fact we were neutral. I remember being told that when going to Geneva with a Fianna Fáil TD and a Fine Gael TD.

A false impression has been created by the militarists in the media and the Government parties about the Security Council deadlock. It is not permanently deadlocked. Between 2020 and 2024, 264 resolutions out of a total of 284 were passed with no veto being exercised.

In relation to the restrictions on more than 12 members, they do not apply in the cases of humanitarian disaster, rescue or emergency mission, etc. There are 11 active peacekeeping missions - including one in Kosovo, which members of the committee will be visiting in a few weeks' time - where Irish peacekeepers are. Only one has been vetoed by the UN Security Council. That was proposed in 1999 for Macedonia and was vetoed by China over a dispute to do with Taiwan. Ireland has been participating since 1958 in peacekeeping missions and Irish troops and peacekeepers have been held in high regard.

It is appropriate that I raise the issue of the Fianna Fáil position. It is not my primary concern. The main reason I am concerned about neutrality is that, as a left republican, I find what is happening scandalous. Grassroots people in Fianna Fáil are saying this to me. The Minister of State lives in Laois, the same as I do, and I am sure she is hearing it. Éamon Ó Cuív, former Fianna Fáil Minister, said at the weekend it is interesting we have a President, Catherine Connolly, who got elected on her positions on neutrality, the triple lock, the North and an teanga Gaeilge.

He said they used to be Fianna Fáil's core policies. That is what he said. Deputy Willie O'Dea, no lesser a figure than a former Minister for Defence, has been writing about the possibility of scraping the triple lock on neutrality. He said that Fianna Fáil abandoning its support for the United Nations is a Fine Gael doctrine, not a Fianna Fáil one. That is not Brian Stanley saying it but it is Deputy Willie O'Dea.

I want go back to the Lisbon and Nice treaties. Successive commitments were given by government at the time. Solemn national commitments were given. Solemn national declarations were enshrined and attached to both treaties. On the first occasion, those two treaties failed to get past the electorate in this State because of concerns over neutrality. They were rejected on the first occasion. Neutrality, the triple lock and UN approval for peacekeeping missions were central to that.

It is worthwhile quoting those declarations again. The following declaration was attached to the Nice treaty. It states that Ireland was not bound by any mutual defence commitment and that "The Government of Ireland have made a firm commitment to the people of Ireland, solemnized in this Declaration, that a referendum will be held in Ireland on the adoption of any such decision and on any future Treaty which would involve Ireland departing from its traditional policy of military neutrality. It also states that deployment of Irish Defence Forces overseas requires the authorisation of the operation by the Security Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations, the agreement of the Government and the approval of Dáil Éireann, in accordance with Irish law. That is what the Fianna Fáil Government put into it at the time.

The Treaty of Lisbon states that in line with its traditional policy of military neutrality, Ireland is not bound by any mutual defence commitment but, of course, we are abolishing the triple lock to be part of a regional military alliance. It also refers to the adoption of any such decision applicable to Ireland and states that this requirement will not be affected should Ireland ratify the Treaty of Lisbon. It goes on to reiterate, as in the case of the Nice treaty, that the authorisation of the UN Security Council and General Assembly, the Dáil and the Government are required in accordance with Irish law. They are two solemn national declarations. They were not just made by government but by the Irish people and on behalf of the Irish people.

Are we going to uphold them? We hear the word "sovereignty" being bandied about and that we need to get rid of the triple lock because it will make us more sovereign but they were sovereign decisions of the people. Are Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael going to trample over that? The Government talks about it but these were sovereign decisions. Were Micheál Martin and his fellow Fianna Fáil Ministers just kidding us on two occasions in the noughties? Were they just coddling the electorate?

I remember campaigning during those referendums on both treaties. Successive opinion polls have clearly demonstrated that the majority of people support neutrality. Is the Government going to turn democracy and the will of the people on its head? That is the question for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

The Government will deny that a referendum is needed to abolish the triple lock. I am asking it to respect the will of the people and to put its proposal to the people if it is going to abolish the triple lock. The Government's proposal will shred the triple lock and shred neutrality. If it has any respect for the electorate, it will do that.

There is also the denial of the fact that the triple lock and neutrality are linked. The Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael spokespersons continue to deny this but I remind them that if Irish troops were deployed on a mission as part of a regional force under the command of other countries, particularly larger countries like Germany, without UN Security Council or General Assembly approval, then they could find themselves in a combat situation possibly in eastern Ukraine against Russia and so on. Of course, if they become embroiled in military combat, they are exposed to attack. Those people who have served overseas and have been involved in some of this will always say that after the first military engagement, no one can predict what is going to happen when a battalion or regiment of troops are deployed. It is unpredictable.

The key message here is that the Government is getting ready to abandon multilateralism and resolving disputes under the UN through dialogue and diplomacy. The argument about the changed world order is another great one that is pulled out. This has been trotted out by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael as justification for getting rid of the triple lock as not being fit for purpose. What does this mean? Does it mean that the Government does not believe in the UN? Is the UN not fit for purpose and should we just get rid of it?

Of course, the UN needs to be upgraded and reformed. There are also scare stories about Russian advances. The Russians have not got as far as Kharkiv yet. We have not seen any evidence of them wanting to invade Dublin just yet, and I do not foresee it any time in the near future. Four drones were flown near Howth Head on the flight path to Dublin Airport as part of the conditioning process to excite people and worry people, so we would abandon neutrality.

There is talk that due to the level of international conflict, we should ditch the UN and join with the militarists in Europe headed by Germany. It is nonsense. We should instead be adding to efforts to enhance the UN and work with other non-aligned states to reform it. We should work with others to re-establish the primacy of multilateralism for resolving disputes.

The triple lock was central to the Defence (Amendment) Act 1960, which was brought in by a Fianna Fáil Minister. That was at the height of the Cold War, so it is important that neutrality and the triple lock are maintained.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta Stanley as an rún seo a mholadh inniu. Neutrality has served this country well for generations. It keeps us focused on peace, diplomacy and humanitarian leadership, not on military alliances. Neutrality is not about standing aside. It about standing firmly for peace, international law and human rights. Our military neutrality gives Ireland credibility on the global stage as a voice for dialogue, conflict resolution and humanitarian action. With this in mind, we should be investing in

peacebuilding, climate action and public services, not drifting towards the increase militarisation we are seeing in Europe and across the globe.

Neutrality reflects the values of many Irish people: independence, solidarity and a commitment to peaceful international engagement. The Government has now proposed the removal of the triple lock authorisation for foreign military activities which has a direct implication on that core ideal of impartiality in military deployments. The Government's proposals risk changing the way that we, as a State, engage with peacekeeping efforts and it will erode our credibility as a neutral voice in conflict scenarios.

Ireland has a positive and, in many ways, a unique voice in international peacekeeping efforts as a post-colonial nation within the EU and one that has avoided being tied to military blocs or to great-power politics. That unique perspective is one that is worth defending.

We must also try to avoid any effort to elide the difference between peacekeeping and peace enforcement. Peacekeeping means the deployment of the minimal multilateral force necessary with the agreement of all sides to a dispute with a mandate to provide a security presence to protect civilian life, to prevent a conflict from escalating further and to create space to build the peace through humanitarian aid and peacebuilding programmes.

Peace enforcement, on the other hand, is the deployment of a force without the specific consent of the parties to a conflict and which uses a coercive military force to impose a cessation in fighting between two or more parties. We should not allow Government proposals around neutrality to confuse these two types of intervention. Ireland's commitment to peacekeeping is in line with the values of the UN Charter and it gives us credibility on issues of peace.

This does not mean being ignorant to the reality of the current geopolitical dynamic which has led to a paralysed UN Security Council. We must enunciate a visible alternative as a State. The solution is not to engage in partisan or *ad hoc* efforts to administer the UN framework as that way lies the Trump Administration's Board of Peace which is little more than an authoritarian vanity project. We should instead work with like-minded neutral states within the UN framework.

Deputy Charles Ward: I thank Deputy Stanley and his staff for bringing forward this motion in defence of neutrality. Maintaining our neutrality has never been more important. From Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan to the escalating tensions in Iran and the wider Middle East conflict, we are facing an era of overlapping conflict, instability, displacement and humanitarian crisis. Millions of people are being affected by war, famine, instability and devastating consequences that extend far beyond borders. Rather than becoming desensitised, now more than ever we must stand in solidarity with the communities impacted by conflict and support all efforts towards peace and resolution. At a time of growing instability, our voice is more important than ever. Our longstanding experience of conflict resolution can play a vital role. As a country we have the experience and skills to offer peace building, diplomacy and dialogue. At a time of deep division, these are the qualities that are most needed. However, we can only play this role from a position of neutrality where our voices remain credible, independent and focused on peace. Neutrality fosters trust. The importance of this cannot be underestimated. I cannot understand why Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are so keen to undermine our neutrality, particularly

in recent years. What do they think can be achieved by this? Nothing, as it will not help us in any way.

A military approach has repeatedly failed to deliver lasting peace in many of the world's conflict zones. It has done nothing but deepen divisions and cause further suffering. We can honestly say that increased military intervention and increased defence spending in the EU and on an international level has brought no closure to conflicts - absolutely nothing. It is clear that many interventions have contributed to further escalations of human suffering, prolonged conflict and diverted focus away from the most important issues of diplomatic solutions and productive dialogue. I am not convinced that the countries staging such interventions are motivated by peace or humanitarian concerns. Strategic interests, economic priorities or outrageous displays of power often shape international responses in conflict. Why would we want to play a part in this? We would threaten our reputation as a neutral country by being involved in this. It is much better to be a peace builder. We have nothing to offer in terms of military power but we can offer much more than other countries can. Our strengths have always been peacekeeping and speaking out against injustice and oppression, not military might. This is something we should be proud of.

Maintaining our neutrality does not mean that we remain silent or condone the atrocities occurring across the world. Neutrality should not be mistaken for indifference. We must continue to stand firmly for human rights, international law and protection of innocent people while doing everything within our power to sanction the countries that are against human rights. The Minister of State has the opportunity to do the right thing tonight by voting in favour of Deputy Boyd Barrett's Sanctions against the State of Israel Bill 2025. Sanctions are important measures in holding these perpetrators accountable. They have a far more meaningful impact than abandoning our neutrality would have. If we keep on going the way we are going, we are heading for an almighty dark era in our country. Abandoning our neutrality only serves to facilitate wars. It does nothing to support victims.

We always have been and always will be outspoken on international matters. As a country, we have always cared deeply for colonised and displaced people across the world. People in Ireland have always been most vocal, particularly when we are supporting Gaza. We absolutely can hold our neutrality while also standing for human rights and dignity. The Government likes to tell us that this is not the case in one way or another. The Irish people have long valued and supported policies of neutrality. Recent polls show that 71% of people think Irish neutrality should be added to the Constitution. We should start to listen to people. We can start listening to people tonight by supporting the Sanctions against the State of Israel Bill 2025 tonight.

Deputy Brian Stanley: Hear, hear.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Tá leasú le cur chun cinn. I call on the Minister of State to move the Government's amendment. Tá deich nóiméad aici.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor): I move amendment No. 1:

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

"notes that:

- the Government reiterates Ireland's longstanding policy of military neutrality;
- Ireland's policy of military neutrality is characterised by non-membership of military alliances, or common or mutual defence arrangements and this policy choice has been practised by successive Governments since the Second World War;
- the Government reaffirms its commitment to this policy and reiterates that it has no plans to either join a military alliance or enter into a mutual defence arrangement;
- in light of the above commitment, the Government does not believe a national referendum on enshrining neutrality into the Irish Constitution is necessary; and
- amending the Triple Lock legislation in relation to the deployment of our Defence Forces to peacekeeping missions will have no impact on this policy of military neutrality, and that no other European Union Member State, including other neutral Member States, allow permanent Security Council members to bind their hands in the way that the Triple Lock effectively does for Ireland;

recognises:

- Ireland's long-standing policy of military neutrality, and our strong tradition of participation in international peace support and crisis management operations over many decades;
- that members of Ireland's Defence Forces continue to contribute bravely to peacekeeping and crisis management efforts, particularly in the Middle East, as well as elsewhere in the world;
- that the multilateral system remains our strongest protection and the State's most important security asset;
- that Ireland's contributions to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and work for human rights and development, and our efforts to promote disarmament and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, are internationally renowned;
- nevertheless, as a highly globalised country, Ireland cannot rely on our geographic isolation for our security, nor isolate ourselves from world events; and
- the importance of parliamentary safeguards and national oversight in ensuring Irish military deployments are in line with our policy of military neutrality, and that they are decided solely by the elected sovereign representatives of the people of Ireland; and

acknowledges that:

- the Government is committed to supporting the global multilateral system, to vocally defend international law, particularly international humanitarian law, and human rights;

— in common with other partners in Europe, Ireland finds itself in an increasingly contested, dynamic and volatile international security environment, marked by violence and conflict in our immediate neighbourhood, including Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, and conflicts in the Middle East and Africa;

— Ireland, therefore, should not find itself unable to respond to peace support and crisis management operations that align with the United Nations (UN) Charter and International Law, due to a veto by permanent member(s) of the UN Security Council; and

— this legislation will remove the power of UN Security Council permanent members to veto our national sovereign decisions regarding our participation in an International Force and will also allow for the deployment of Defence Forces personnel overseas in other overseas roles such as the crisis management evacuation of Irish citizens."

- Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade; and Defence.

I thank everyone for raising this issue today. I am taking this matter on behalf of the Minister, Deputy McEntee. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the important matters raised in this motion. At a time when excellence and the longstanding work of our Defence Forces in UNIFIL has been at the forefront of the public's mind, given the deterioration of the security landscape in the Middle East region and particularly in Lebanon, it is appreciated that we debate how we deploy our Defence Forces overseas.

I acknowledge all our Defence Forces personnel who are currently serving overseas. I am mindful of the sacrifices they and their families make in serving their country and the interests of peace. Members may be aware that the rotation of our Defence Forces battalion in Lebanon is currently ongoing and expected to be completed by next week. I fully recognise the strong public interest and the deep attachment to Ireland's military neutrality as well as the strength of feeling around this issue. I acknowledge that there are concerns and in some cases misunderstandings about the impact that proposed amendments to the Defence Acts may have on that policy of military neutrality. This includes changes to the provision commonly referred to as the triple lock. However, the Private Members' motion today misrepresents both by linking the proposed reform of the triple lock with Ireland's policy of neutrality and the amendment of domestic legislation with the need for a referendum on the issue.

I would like to outline what we mean when we talk about Ireland's policy of military neutrality. Ireland does not participate in military alliances or common or mutual defence arrangements. This policy choice has been practised by successive Governments since the Second World War. The Government has clarified this on many occasions in the past. I am happy to put it on the record again today that we have no plans to alter this policy. Indeed, the Government made this explicitly clear by including a commitment to preserving and protecting Ireland's policy of military neutrality in the programme for Government, as published last year. We did this because we know that Ireland's policy of military neutrality has long been an important strand of our independent foreign policy. This does not mean we can isolate ourselves from the international security environment we find ourselves in today. The changing global security context means we have to take our own security and our responsibility towards our like-minded partners more seriously than ever. For this reason, the Government is

committed to broadening and deepening Ireland's international security engagement as well as our domestic efforts to ensure the security of our country.

We all have to acknowledge that the world as we know it has changed considerably. The international rules-based order is under significant strain and Ireland needs to adapt to this new reality. In a mature democracy like ours, it is important that we have a responsive and considered foreign policy, as we have had since the foundation of the State. This is solely the sovereign responsibility of the Irish people. For this reason, the Government does not support the proposal to hold a referendum enshrining neutrality in the Constitution. The policy of military neutrality has been a deliberate policy choice on the part of successive Governments since the Second World War. If passed, this motion would significantly restrict the Government's ability to exercise its policy-making authority with regard to the conduct of external relations as set out under Article 29 of the Constitution. Accordingly, the Government has no plans to bring forward legislation to hold a constitutional referendum on neutrality.

We all recognise that the UN Security Council is not effectively fulfilling its primary role of maintaining global peace and security. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council have a veto power which can prevent the adoption of resolutions by the Security Council, including those authorising peacekeeping mandates. In practice, even the threat of veto is often enough to halt Council action. Ireland has consistently opposed the use of the veto, as demonstrated during our most recent term on the Security Council from 2021 to 2022, when we witnessed its use on several critical issues. As evidenced by challenges encountered last summer in relation to the renewal of the UNIFIL mandate in southern Lebanon, the threat or use of the UN Security Council veto is a significant complicating factor in sustaining international peacekeeping operations. With particular regard to UNIFIL, the uncertainty caused by the possibility of a veto over negotiations of an extension to that mission's mandate last summer created a situation in which Ireland had to prepare a contingency plan for immediate withdrawal of Defence Forces personnel in the event that the mandate was not extended.

While the renewal of the UNIFIL mandate until the end of this year has allowed for the continued deployment of Irish personnel, the vulnerability remains.

Recent years have seen a trend towards an increase in the use of the veto. The veto was exercised eight times in 2024 and four times in 2025. Indeed, 2024 saw the largest number of vetoed resolutions since 1986. The impact of the threat of the veto on the work of the Security Council is more difficult to quantify but its influence on the council's deliberations is clear to any informed observer. The Government believes, therefore, that the legislation underpinning the overseas deployments of our Defence Forces needs to be amended to reflect the current realities in which we are living. This Government, as well as the previous Government, have been clear that we need a new process to replace the current system, which effectively allows permanent members of the Security Council to bind Ireland's hands in its international engagement.

Conflict and insecurity are clearly evident and they are having a harrowing impact on communities across the world. Yet, no new UN peacekeeping or peace enforcement mission has been mandated since 2014. We need a mechanism where our elected representatives in the Government and the Dáil have the power to direct the dispatch of our Defence Forces overseas. The proposed changes to the legislation will continue to require Government and Dáil approval

for the dispatch of the Defence Forces as part of an international force, such as the UN. If anything, a removal of the influence of an external organisation on Ireland's decision-making processes for dispatching military assets and personnel enhances our ability to make national and sovereign decisions on these key issues. Why would we wish to curtail our independent decision-making? Whose interests does that serve?

This is not in any shape or form an attempt to disengage from the UN. Ireland remains firmly committed to the UN, the UN Charter and UN peacekeeping operations. It is important to note that, under these legislative proposals, Ireland will make national decisions but, importantly, they will be in line with the principles of the UN Charter and international law. Ireland has always taken an active approach to global challenges and made significant contributions to international peace and security. Partnership has always been at the heart of all our international engagement. We have always engaged constructively with our international partners in the UN and EU, and we are committed to continue to work closely with our fellow EU member states, through the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, CSDP, to address the common challenges we face.

With regard to the next steps for proposed changes to the despatch of Defence Forces personnel overseas, a memorandum for Government seeking approval for the Bill will be brought to the Government shortly. Subject to that approval, the Bill will then be published and progressed through the Oireachtas.

The Government's countermotion reiterates our support for Ireland's long-standing policy of military neutrality and our commitment to multilateralism. It reaffirms that the Government does not believe a referendum on the matter is either necessary or appropriate. At the same time, it reflects our desire for a modern, fit-for-purpose foreign, security and defence policy, in keeping with the challenges we face today. It underscores the importance of ensuring Irish military deployments are to missions that uphold the principles of the UN Charter and international law, in line with our policy of military neutrality, and that they are decided solely by the elected sovereign representatives of the people of Ireland. Ireland's security and defence policy will remain firmly grounded in military neutrality, complemented by our active and principled engagement within the European Union, the United Nations and other international forums.

Our values and commitment to multilateralism, the rules-based international order and peace have not changed, but the global landscape has. We must be capable of adapting foreign and defence policy to meet these new realities. The Government's countermotion reflects that balance. It reaffirms our commitment to neutrality and multilateralism, makes clear that a referendum is neither necessary nor appropriate and underscores our determination to ensure that Ireland's foreign, security and defence policy is modern, effective and fit for purpose. In light of that, I call on the House to support the Government's countermotion.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I thank Deputy Stanley for bringing forward this important motion on protecting our neutrality. As the Deputy's motion alludes to, the origin of Irish neutrality lies with Theobald Wolfe Tone, one of Ireland's greatest revolutionaries. He developed the concept of Irish neutrality in 1790 in the context of a debate in the Irish Parliament about whether Ireland should, essentially, back Britain. It was obliged to back Britain in an impending war with Spain. Wolfe Tone argued that it was, essentially, a betrayal

of our struggle for autonomy and against empire to be in any way a staging ground for empires in wars. That is where neutrality came from. That radical, anti-imperialist notion of neutrality was then taken forward by James Connolly, Pádraig Pearse and Constance Markievicz when they set up the Irish Neutrality League in 1914 when the First World War broke out. That was another war between empires in which people tried to argue that Ireland was obliged to support the British empire in an inter-imperialist slaughter that claimed the lives of 14 million people. Tens of thousands of working-class Irish people, who were economically conscripted, were slaughtered in that war. This proud, anti-imperialist tradition is integrally tied up with who we are as a country in opposing empires.

Do I trust the Irish Government with our neutrality? No, because it has already shredded it in doing exactly what Connolly, Markievicz, Pearse and Wolfe Tone did not want us to do, namely, become a staging ground for empires engaged in wars, most notably Shannon Airport. Millions of US troops transited through Shannon Airport while they prosecuted a criminal war in Iraq that claimed the lives of 1 million people. That was a war for oil, led by the US and the UK, that destabilised the whole Middle East. There would be no Al-Qaeda or half of these other groups were it not for that disastrous, criminal war based on lies about weapons of mass destruction. We allowed millions of US troops to go through Shannon Airport because the Irish Government and the political establishment wanted to align themselves with the American empire.

That same American empire today, led by Donald Trump, is telling Europe that it must spend more on weapons. Donald Trump is goading. Should we listen to his goading that Europe has to militarise, play its part in NATO and spend more on weapons rather than health, housing and education? I say "No". Defending our neutrality means not listening to his goading or involving ourselves in a project of militarisation in Europe, which is alarmingly reminiscent of the build-up to previous world wars, with geopolitical jockeying and a militarisation of big powers across the globe as they try to carve out spheres of influence. We should not be involved in that.

The triple lock is precisely about ensuring that we do not get involved in wars where empires are clashing and that we do not take sides with empires. We oppose empire. Do I trust our Government when we look at current events? I want to speak up for the 14 Irish people upholding our tradition of neutrality on the Global Sumud Flotilla who have been kidnapped by Israel in international waters. Europe does nothing about this rogue state that is guilty of genocide, apartheid and flouting every bit of international law. It is now kidnapping Irish people and imprisoning them because they are trying to uphold international law. What does the Irish Government do with the Israeli state that is doing all of this? We have increased our trade with it. We approved €20 million in licences to export dual-use goods to the Israeli military that is carrying out genocide and kidnapping Irish citizens. I, therefore, do not trust the Government. The agenda is to get involved in a European militarisation project and align Ireland with the western empire that arms Israel and is up to its teeth in warmongering. After the disasters of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, we should not trust the Government. We should hold onto the triple lock and retain that tradition of neutrality that goes back to our revolutionary, anti-imperialist roots.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I thank Deputy Stanley for this excellent and important motion. I will start with a quote from the Fianna Fáil Minister of State, Deputy Troy:

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

Does the Minister of State, Deputy Murnane O'Connor, agree with the Minister of State, Deputy Troy, on that? I will repeat the quote, if the Minister of State wants:

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

Does the Minister of State, Deputy Murnane O'Connor, agree with that? Is that the Government position? I will try again.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): It is not a debate.

Deputy Paul Murphy: This is from 5 March. Is this the Government's position or not? The Minister of State, Deputy Troy, said:

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

He was summing up a debate on the Middle East on 5 March. There is a problem with the Government, if that is its position. What does the triple lock do? It means that we cannot send troops except where there is a UN mandate or authorisation. That is precisely what the triple lock does. The Minister of State, Deputy Troy, was correct in what he said. The deployment of forces outside the framework of a UN mandate or authorisation is against international law. That is the truth. The reason the Minister of State, Deputy Murnane O'Connor, does not want to answer whether that is the Government's position is revealing. The Government wants to get rid of the triple lock because it wants to send troops abroad outside the framework of international law. There is all this talk of vetoing this, that and the other. The triple lock means we can only send troops within the framework of international law. That is all it does. The Government wants to get rid of the triple lock because it wants to send troops outside the framework of international law. That is the reality.

Another Fianna Fáiler said that for decades, Fianna Fáil was clear that the triple lock, which makes military deployments contingent on a UN mandate plus Dáil and Cabinet decisions, was critical to our neutrality. He said that was the unambiguous position under every party leader since Seán Lemass. He said that suddenly, and without discussion, the triple lock was anathema. Those were the words of former defence Minister, Deputy Willie O'Dea.

Why is this happening now? Why is the Government trying to get rid of the triple lock while pretending to the rest of us that this has nothing to do with reality? It is not telling the truth to people. It is redefining neutrality, as has happened again in the Minister's speech today, as simply being that Ireland does not participate in military alliances or common or mutual defence arrangements. In other words, the Government says that we could have sent troops to participate in the invasion of Iraq, which would have been possible if not for the triple lock, but can still say Ireland is neutral as long as it does not join NATO. It can join the joint

expeditionary force, send weapons to Ukraine, train Ukrainian soldiers, participate in the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, which meets at NATO headquarters, and buy billions of euro of weapons from French arms manufacturers. It can do all that, while saying it is neutral because neutrality has been redefined by the Government to simply mean not signing on the dotted line to become a member of NATO.

Why is this happening now? The Government's answer is to point to Ukraine and Russia, and more vaguely to other conflicts internationally, and to say that the triple lock, for which one should read "the UN system as a whole", because the triple lock means UN approval by either the General Assembly or the Security Council, is no longer fit for purpose. We look around the world and know where that attitude leads. Look at Gaza and Lebanon. Look at attacks on UN peacekeeping troops by Israel, including our own troops. There has been mass murder of UN and humanitarian workers on a scale unprecedented in history and genocide carried out openly and unpunished before the eyes of the entire world. The reason the Government and large sections of the media want to get rid of Irish neutrality is not because people here are more unsafe. We are a small, geographically isolated country that would never conceivably be able to defend itself militarily. It has no colonial past or history of military aggression. Neutrality is our best defence. That argument makes no sense.

What this is about is that the ruling classes have been fattened up by decades of US foreign direct investment and corporate tax haven bonanzas, and now think of themselves not as a part of a post-colonial periphery but instead want to be a part of the western imperialist core. They want to get in on the act of the intervening in weaker countries and profiting from the military industrial complex. They want to be big boys in the big boys' club in the European Union and NATO, not down in the General Assembly with other post-colonial countries. That is why we have the development of a military industrial complex in this country. It is why the Minister of State repeatedly used the phrase "a referendum is neither necessary nor appropriate". Why is it not necessary or appropriate? Of course it is not necessary for the Government. It just wants to get rid of the triple lock. Why is not appropriate? The people do not believe the Government. They do not agree with the Government and it knows that. The Government should allow the people to decide. If it is so confident on this issue, it should allow the people to have a plebiscite on its proposal to get rid of the triple lock.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: There were a couple of lines in the Minister of State's speech that jumped out, but there was one in particular. The Minister of State said "the Private Members' motion today misrepresents both as it links the proposed reform of the triple lock with Ireland's policy of neutrality". I have heard that previously. The Minister of State is saying that it is unreasonable to link changes to the Defence Acts, which govern the deployment of Irish personnel as part of an international force, with neutrality. The suggestion is that it is somehow an unreasonable connection. The Government is amending the Defence Acts to allow a greater set of circumstances in which Irish personnel could be deployed as part of an international force and suggests somehow that this has nothing to do with neutrality. We get some daft talking points in this place, but that is right up there. I encourage the civil servants to drop that point. It makes absolutely no sense.

The fact is that the triple lock is central to neutrality. The Taoiseach has said so numerous times. It is a cornerstone of our foreign policy. Those are his words. The Government sometimes in this debate likes to cast itself as far-seeing and wise, and suggests that those of

us on this side of the House do not see the bigger picture. As far as I am concerned, what the Government is doing is reckless, foolish, careless and short-sighted. Ultimately, it will significantly diminish Ireland's place in the world.

I hear the Taoiseach talking about the importance of multilateralism, international law and so on, at the very same time that he is undermining the UN. He and the Minister of State and their Government are the ones talking about deploying Irish personnel. We hope they will be deployed on peacekeeping missions, but it is very likely that they will go on other kinds of deployments outside international law and without a UN mandate. That is what this is about.

People talk about the Security Council. There is an awful lot of talk of vetoes and so on. The reality is more complex. At the end of the day, it is not the case that there is going to be some high-minded UN-led missions that we are not going to be on. The mission would not proceed otherwise. There is no UN peacekeeping mission without a UN mandate.

There are a lot of other myths. People talk about Irish citizens at risk, humanitarian evacuations, drug interdictions and different things. The reality is that the triple lock does not prevent any of those things. It does not prevent the Defence Forces participating in humanitarian evacuation, the rescue of civilians, training, drug interdictions or any of those things, nor does it prevent us from investing in our Defence Forces. As far as I am concerned, Ireland should be strong on defence and neutrality. This Government is neither. Allowances agreed with the Defence Forces have been unpaid. Several personnel are down by thousands of euro. Overtime is not being recorded properly, and, therefore, personnel are not getting the overtime they ought to be getting. That is the reality of the Government's relationship with the Defence Forces. They have been neglected and more people have left than joined in recent years.

The triple lock does not prevent us from showing adequate respect to the men and women in our Defence Forces. It does mean that when Irishmen and Irishwomen serve as a part of a peacekeeping mission, they do so under a UN flag. They have done so with pride and distinction for generations. We ought to be proud of them. In recent weeks and months, they have faced enormous risks as they hold their position in Lebanon, which is being attacked by an Israeli Government that is hell-bent on occupying south Lebanon and expanding into more of it. This is an Israeli Government backed to the hilt by the United States. For a generation now, the Government has facilitated the US military's expansion, attacks and illegal wars. There was an under-reporting of 250 flights over Ireland last year. Some €20 million in dual-use licences have been handed out. At the same time that the Government is saying that the triple lock has nothing to do with our neutrality, it is riding roughshod over neutrality by facilitating flights over Ireland and through Shannon Airport with weaponry, personnel and so on.

The reality is that the Irish people take a lot of pride in neutrality but they also see that it makes sense for Ireland. Ireland is never going to be a major military power. The people know the best way we can exert influence is through standing up for international law and calling out breaches, whether by friend or foe, and whether we have a good relationship or a bad relationship with the country in question. The Government is failing on that count and it should stop itself from going further down this road by getting rid of the triple lock neutrality protection.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Clearly, we are living through a dangerous moment in Irish politics. Piece by piece, step by step, there is a growing effort by the Government parties to weaken Irish neutrality and dismantle the triple lock. Neutrality is not weakness; it is a positive expression of Irish independence. It is the belief that Ireland should decide its own path in the world, free from the influence of military blocs, imperial powers or the interests of bigger states.

For decades, neutrality has allowed Ireland to speak with some moral authority on the world stage. It has allowed Irish peacekeepers to serve with pride in UN missions. It has allowed us to support diplomacy over war, and peace over profit. That tradition is needed now more than ever. It reflects the lived experience of past generations of Irish people who experienced colonisation, occupation and conflict. That is why the triple lock matters so much. It ensures that Irish soldiers are sent abroad only for peacekeeping and humanitarian purposes, not dragged into foreign wars because of pressure from NATO, the EU military agenda or powerful allies. Yet, what we are hearing now from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is that the triple lock is somehow outdated. We are hearing that it limits Ireland's flexibility and we are hearing calls to remove UN approval altogether.

The agenda of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael is blatantly obvious. They want the power, as parties in a Government with a Dáil majority, to deploy Irish troops abroad with far fewer restrictions. That would represent a fundamental change in Irish foreign policy, and the Irish people have not consented to it.

Let us be clear that advocating for neutrality does not mean neglecting defence. Ireland absolutely needs properly funded defence forces. Our Naval Service, Air Corps and Army have been neglected for years. Recruitment and retention crises have been ignored. Investment is needed to protect Irish waters, ensure cybersecurity and retain emergency response capacity. However, strengthening defence is not the same as abandoning neutrality. A genuinely independent Ireland should be strong on both neutrality and defence. We can defend our people and sovereignty without becoming part of military alliances or surrendering democratic safeguards like the triple lock.

At its core, this debate is about what kind of Ireland we want to have. Do we want an Ireland that follows larger powers into military conflicts or an Ireland that stands for diplomacy, peacekeeping, humanitarianism and international law? Do we want decisions about war and peace made by political elites?

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I thank Deputy Stanley for this very important motion.

Our neutrality is not an accident of history. It is a conscious expression of our independence, sovereignty and belief that small nations can be a force for peace in the world. Our non-participation in foreign conflicts or military alliances has earned Ireland respect across the globe, but this reputation has been steadily undermined by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, which seem hell-bent on dismantling the triple lock and sending Irish men and women overseas to fight foreign wars.

For years now, Shannon Airport has been used as a hub for the US military, facilitating the transport of armed troops and munitions to active war zones, including in the Middle East. This completely compromises our position of neutrality in the eyes of the world. We find ourselves

in a staggering situation in which our own peacekeeping personnel are being sent from Baldonnel to serve with UNIFIL in Lebanon while, hot on their tails, US warplanes, permitted to use Shannon, are carrying the bombs that will be dropped by Israel around their base.

That this is still being allowed shows complete disregard for our sovereignty and military neutrality. How can Ireland claim to stand for peace, diplomacy and international law, or speak with any moral authority to countries suffering the consequences of war, if we allow our neutrality to be hollowed out piece by piece? The triple lock is central to protecting that neutrality. It is a democratic safeguard and a guarantee to the Irish people. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael want to dismantle that protection without the consent of the people. Sinn Féin rejects that approach completely. We support strengthening our Defence Forces, but our defence policy must be rooted in independence, multilateralism and peacekeeping, not closer alignment with military alliances. If Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael truly believe the Irish people want to abandon neutrality, it should be put to the people in a referendum.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Sometimes when I am in this Chamber, with its busts and statues of the 1916 leaders all around, I find what I listen to from the Government astonishing. I think of the famous banner that stated, "We serve neither King nor Kaiser, but Ireland". That is a really proud declaration and it is burned into the hearts of the Irish people because they were colonised for long enough and fought empire for long enough. It is a proud stand that we have taken for all of these years, and it has given us real credibility to engage on the international stage in peacekeeping, the defence of human rights and the resolution of conflicts. That has been our proud position for so many years. It is cherished by the Irish people.

I find the Government's current position disgusting when I think that, at the first ask, the Irish people rejected the Nice and Lisbon treaty propositions. The propositions were put back to the Irish people with clear, solemn promises around our neutrality and the triple lock. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael made those promises to the Irish people and now they want to break them. This will not stand. If the Government believes it is right in removing the triple lock, it has to be put to the Irish people. It has to be put to them because they were given promises when they voted for the Nice and Lisbon treaties at the second ask.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: The Government proposal to cut the triple lock neutrality protections stands among the most significant foreign affairs and defence policy departures in decades, so it is important that it be properly considered and understood. It is concerning that the Taoiseach's own position is consistent only in its shifting nature.

Initially, the Taoiseach proposed a citizens' assembly on neutrality. Then it became a so-called consultative forum on international security policy, providing minimal interaction for the public or the Opposition, in favour of voices hand-picked by Government. When the report from that stroke reported no public appetite for change to our position on neutrality, the Taoiseach announced his plans to get rid of the triple lock neutrality protection altogether. He tells us that it will have no impact on our neutrality, despite his having told this House in 2013 that it was the core of our neutrality, and despite the Department of foreign affairs website clearly stating our European partners understand our policy of military neutrality with reference to the triple lock.

The Taoiseach needs to be upfront as to why his public statements on neutrality today differ from those of the past and from those of his Government's contemporary publications. He should consider what it means to him to hold something as solemn, because he was part of the Government that made a solemn national declaration to the Irish people on the triple lock in advance of the second Nice and Lisbon treaty referendums. I invite him, and in fact all members of Fianna Fáil, to reflect on what value they believe members of the public should place on their word.

Deputy Thomas Gould: In 2013, the current Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, described the triple lock as being at the core of our neutrality. At the time, there were protests in Kyiv, and the following year the annexation of Crimea took place. There was a war in Afghanistan and there was a civil war in Syria, with the Russians and the Americans involved in it.

11 o'clock

Now he is saying times have drastically changed but that is not true. Things were as bad then as they are now on the world stage when it comes to wars. For as long as I have been alive, leaders of powerful imperialist countries have waged wars and Ireland has remained neutral. During the Lisbon and Nice treaty campaigns, a solemn commitment was given to the people of Ireland that the triple lock would protect our neutrality and now the Government is trying to get rid of it. It is wrong. What the Government is doing is against the people's will. We want a referendum. Let the people have their say and let them decide, not our Taoiseach and our Tánaiste who are trying to be the good boys for the EU. What is their point? I cannot understand what their point is when they know the Irish people do not want this. It just goes to prove how lost this Government is, when it goes off to Europe and forgets about the people of Ireland and what they want. Our neutrality is at the core. There is a bigger picture here. This is not just about what Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael want but what the people of Ireland want. That should be sacred.

Deputy Paul Donnelly: I welcome the appointment of Lynn Boylan, Sinn Féin's Dublin MEP, to the security and defence committee. She will be a powerful voice in the EU for Irish neutrality and against a militarised Europe.

Irish Army personnel are renowned for peacekeeping missions around the world in war-torn countries, not for going off to fight other people's wars. They are renowned for bringing peace to areas where truces and ceasefires are brittle. We have a proud history of peace and conflict resolution but the Government is asking us to get into bed with countries that are not only defending, but arming a genocide. The lack of meaningful action in the defence of international law is weakening the foundations of multilateralism. Indeed, by abandoning the protection of the triple lock that grounds our neutrality, the Government is signalling to the world that it does not believe in the UN. While the UN has its flaws, it still represents the best opportunity to engage in dialogue rather than conflict and loss of life.

Reference was made to the programme for Government but one thing included in that programme that the Government has not brought forward is the occupied territories Bill. The Government brings an amendment to the motion to the House but not the occupied territories Bill. It was said earlier that there is a reason for the Government not supporting the proposal to hold a referendum to enshrine neutrality. What is the Government so afraid of? It is afraid

of the voice of the people of Ireland because they have said in the Nice and Lisbon treaty referenda that they do not support the ending of our neutrality. They do not support Irish soldiers going to fight other wars on behalf of the people who colonised this country and the people who are arming and participating in genocide. We want nothing to do with those people. If the Government is really serious about the Irish people and democracy, it should hold a referendum. It is in its hands.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: We have a long history in Ireland of resistance to colonial oppression and of liberation struggle, albeit unfinished. What is this Government promising? It is promising the removal of the triple lock because it does not really matter. The only logic behind removing the triple lock is to move away from our long history of non-alignment and of having clean hands, which there is definitely space for in this modern world. What have we been stopped from doing on the basis of the triple lock? That is what I want to know. My fear is not about what we have been stopped from doing but what this Government is willing to do and who it is willing to align itself with. We have seen the absolute failure to deal with Shannon Airport facilitating the American military through many of its failures and escapades that have led to nothing but death and destruction, including in Iraq and Afghanistan, long before Donald Trump came to power. We are dealing now with the reality and the madness of the attacks on Iran by the US, led by the nose by genocidal Israel. What about Israel? We have a great history of peacekeeping but what have our peacekeepers been dealing with lately? They have been dealing with genocidal, ethnic cleansing acts of an Israeli regime, supported by the US, that is out of control. We are talking about removing one of the protections we have in relation to neutrality and non-alignment. We need independent foreign policy. There is an absolute fear of the Irish people on the part of this Government. If it is serious about this, it will put it to the people. It will not do so because it is afraid of the people's view, which is that we cannot remove neutrality or the triple lock. I have yet to see any courage from the Government. It will just follow whoever it needs to follow on the basis of being the best boys in the eyes of the US or the European Union.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: I thank Deputy Stanley for bringing this important motion forward. The Labour Party will support it and I would like to take the opportunity to restate our firm commitment to the principle of military neutrality, the retention of the triple lock and our country's continued promotion of peace and an end to war. We know the immense human cost of war. We see it on our screens every day from Gaza to Ukraine to Sudan. Aside from the profound human suffering, as our party's environment spokesperson and this being National Biodiversity Week, it would be remiss of me not to mention the massive environmental, climate and ecological impacts of war that are not spoken about enough.

Militaries contribute 5.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions. We know that war is driving deforestation, agricultural decline, industrial pollution and the collapse of health and sanitation systems. We see the destruction of the basic facilities and systems that make human life possible, including water networks, sewage treatment plants, farmland, ports, fuel depots and electricity infrastructure, often leaving polluted air, contaminated soil and unsafe water long after the fighting ends. We see fires, oil spills, toxic debris, damaged sanitation, collapsing public health systems and ecosystems pushed beyond recovery. We all have a human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the promotion of peace internationally, via our neutrality, should be at least one method for our State to pursue this vital right.

Neutrality has been central to our foreign policy since the Second World War and it has been an active neutrality. It is an expression of our sovereignty, independent judgement and a belief that small nations such as ours can contribute to peace not through military alliances, but through diplomacy, humanitarianism, peacekeeping and international law. For decades, it has allowed us to carve out a respected position on the world stage precisely because we have refused to become an appendage to a large military power. Our neutrality has stood us in good stead. It is widely supported among the public who have consistently and repeatedly expressed their support for neutrality and continue to do so in every opinion poll on the matter. However, our neutrality is not secure. It does not have constitutional status. The Labour Party has long-supported enshrining neutrality in our Constitution and published a proposed wording for an amendment to this effect as far back as 2002.

Our neutrality is a large part of the reason our peacekeepers, of whom we are all immensely proud, are so well-respected and trusted in conflict zones. Members of our Defence Forces have served as peacekeepers with distinction the world over, protecting civilians, monitoring ceasefires, delivering aid and so on. Our reputation for peacekeeping has flourished because of our position as a neutral county. The removal of the triple lock risks undermining that reputation precisely because it risks undermining our neutrality. As the Taoiseach once said, in what I guess was a previous life, it is "the core of our neutrality". The triple lock ensures not only that any overseas engagement is safeguarded against the whims of the Executive or geopolitical pressures, but that its grounded in international law, which itself brings legitimacy, respect and an additional level of confidence in the safety of our Defence Forces personnel who are being deployed. We do not need to look too far to see the disastrous effects of unilateral wars and illegal invasions that bypass international institutions and can start on a whim. This is all playing out in the Middle East right now with Trump and Netanyahu's illegal attacks on Iran.

The Government, in its argument for removing the triple lock, often points to the dysfunction of the UN Security Council and there is some truth to that argument.

However, the answer is not just to abandon multilateralism. Right now, international institutions, multilateral co-operation and international law are all under sustained attack and probably have never been more in need of advocates, at least since the Cold War. We should seek to strengthen the credibility of the UN, not weaken our commitment to it. If the Government believes the Security Council requires reform, that is fine; I largely agree. Let us advocate for that reform. What we must not do is retreat from the institution and potentially jeopardise our neutrality in the process.

The Government's proposal is that deployments be authorised by the approval of the Government and the passing of a resolution of the Dáil. Assuming that Whips would operate as normal for Government parties and there would not be a free vote on such a resolution, the proposal would mean, in essence, that our Defence Forces could be deployed on the whim of whichever government is in power. No international assent would be required and there would be no further safeguards. It is a deeply concerning prospect and the Government should know that. Ministers can deny it all they want but it leaves the door open to our Defence Forces getting involved in NATO missions, an EU common defence arrangement or some other military composition that would, in effect, spell an end to our neutrality.

On the Defence Forces and our defence capabilities more broadly, the Labour Party is a staunch defender of our military neutrality and the triple lock, and always will be. However, we also acknowledge that, politically speaking, when we debate our neutrality, the substance of the debate rarely moves past the triple lock. Its removal would erode our neutrality and risk damaging the unique voice we have in international affairs, whereby we have historically punched well above our weight. What often gets lost, however, is that neutrality is not the same as passivity in terms of the Defence Forces and our defence capabilities. We should not accept that there is a contradiction between our policy of neutrality and investing in our defence.

On the contrary, our position of neutrality means it is incumbent on us to ensure we invest in defence. That is how we ensure our sovereignty when it comes to these matters. At present, we rely on the UK, a NATO member, for our air defences. I fear that our neutrality, and an assumption that if worst came to worst, the UK would come to our rescue, has led to a certain level of complacency in building up our own capacity to defend ourselves. We hope we will never have to do so but the reality is we exist in an increasingly unstable and unpredictable geopolitical arena. While we cannot and will not under any circumstances accept a role in a common defence pact or any offensive actions involving Irish troops, we have a responsibility to get our own house in order.

The best insurance policy against any external threats to our neutrality is to ensure we have some reasonable defence capabilities. We cannot continue outsourcing our defence. Irish people are realistic about what is possible but we do not want to feel we are defenceless and unable, for example, to monitor our territorial waters and respond to perceived threats. Those threats, to name but a few, might take the form of large-scale drug smuggling operations or potential interference by bad actors in our vital undersea cables or electricity and gas interconnectors. Our neutrality will become more and more fragile if we do not act on those threats.

An over-reliance on our political allies for monitoring and protection leaves us vulnerable to being politically pressured into scenarios that legitimately threaten our neutrality. We need to take corrective actions in terms of our own defence capabilities. Our Defence Forces have nowhere near the levels of personnel they need, with fewer than 7,500 members at present. That shortfall is not surprising when we look at the pay and conditions on offer. For instance, cadets get €503 per week for their first year, compared with starting pay of €550 per week for recruits, who move to €814 after six months. Cadets earn 47% less than their enlisted counterparts in their first year. It is no wonder we have struggled with recruitment for so long. As my colleague Deputy Smith said in the Dáil a couple of weeks ago, it may be financially illogical to become a cadet in view of the long-term impact on pension entitlements. In addition, the supplementary pension scheme issue, which is a problem across our uniformed services, is playing into our difficulties with recruitment and retention.

These issues need be addressed. Our investment in building up our defence capabilities should be focused first and foremost on our people. The failure to get on top of our low level of Defence Forces membership is having knock-on effects elsewhere. There is a recommended acceleration programme of naval vessel replacement, for example, to ensure a balanced fleet of nine modern ships by the early 2030s. However, the problem in the Naval Service is not

that there are no vessels; it is that we have no one to staff them. Throwing money at more vessels will not work. The investment must be in our people.

We in the Labour Party have always maintained that Ireland is a militarily neutral country, and proudly so, but we are not politically neutral. We cannot compromise on our values. We cannot be politically neutral in the face of Israel's genocide in Gaza or Russia's imperialist invasion of Ukraine. Ireland's political voice should continue to be one that speaks for peace, diplomacy and multilateralism. The reason we can do that, and do it sincerely, is our military neutrality. I commend Deputy Stanley on his motion. Neutrality is the only path forward and any attempt by the Government to undermine it will be met with the utmost opposition by the Labour Party and by all of us across the left.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I move amendment No. 1 to amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after "notes that:" and substitute the following:

- Ireland's policy of military neutrality, our strong reputation of international diplomacy, and our tradition of peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance abroad;
- the importance of public, democratic consultation in shaping Ireland's future defence policy;
- the importance of safeguards, protections and oversight in ensuring Irish military deployments are in line with our policy of military neutrality; and
- the Government plans to remove the current Triple Lock mechanism and raise the number of troops that can be deployed without Dáil oversight to 50;

acknowledges:

- that the Triple Lock mechanism requires (i) Government approval, (ii) Dáil approval, and (iii) a United Nations (UN) mandate through the General Assembly or Security Council for the deployment of more than 12 Irish Defence Forces personnel overseas;
- that the Triple Lock mechanism was introduced to protect our military neutrality during the adoption of the Nice and Lisbon Treaties; and
- that the UN mandate has played a significant role in shaping Ireland's approach to international military engagement and cooperation;

calls on the Government to:

- recognise that the Triple Lock and neutrality are intrinsically linked;
- uphold the policy of neutrality and the Triple Lock as set out in the Defence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 1960 and the solemn national declarations attached to the Nice and Lisbon Treaties;
- abide by the principal of multilateralism and not allow the State to become part of any regional military alliance;

- hold a national plebiscite, to take place before any legislation to amend the Triple Lock mechanism is brought before the Dáil, to allow the Irish people to express their view on whether a United Nations mandate should remain a requirement for Ireland to deploy peacekeeping troops overseas;
- ensure that the plebiscite presents a balanced and informed choice, reflecting the role of the Triple Lock mechanism in Ireland's approach to international deployments to date, the considerations around its impact on peacekeeping operations in the future, and any scope for the removal of the Triple Lock mechanism to result in potential non-neutral military deployment; and
- commit to respecting the outcome of the plebiscite and ensuring that any subsequent policy decisions reflect the will of the people while upholding Ireland's commitment to military neutrality, multilateralism, and international cooperation."

I thank Deputy Stanley, his colleagues and his team for bringing forward this motion. It is long overdue that we have an opportunity to speak about neutrality and the triple lock in the Chamber.

I acknowledge the efforts of the many volunteers in the Irish Neutrality League and other organisations who work so hard on this issue. Uplift is doing amazing work to mobilise communities across Ireland. I am very proud to be a member of the parliamentary wing of the Irish Neutrality League. As Deputy Boyd Barrett mentioned, when it was originally formed, the league included as members heroes of mine such as Countess Markievicz. It is an area in which we are working really well across the Opposition. We do not all hold the exact same position but it is approximately the same. We certainly oppose the defence (amendment) Bill being put forward by the Government.

This is an area on which not just left-wing Opposition parties but the full range of Opposition Members are in unison. I appreciate the Minister of State's attendance in the Chamber and acknowledge her indication that the Minister for Defence will be here presently. However, at this stage, I expect the Minister will not arrive until 11.45 a.m., when she will make a closing statement. That means she will not have the benefit of hearing the unity of voices across the Opposition benches in defence of our neutrality and in opposition to the Government's attempt to dismantle it.

That is why I tabled my amendment. It is not in any way intended to compete with the work of Deputy Stanley. Since I have been in Dáil Éireann, one of the most cynical practices I have witnessed is the Government's response to Private Members' motions. People outside the Chamber do not really understand what goes on. I find it offensive that the Government tables an amendment whereby it takes the entire text of a motion put forward by the Opposition in a spirit of genuine debate and replaces it with a self-praising, self-aggrandising and totally contradictory statement. That is what the Government does every time. Of course, it does so because it does not want to have to vote against what is proposed, which, in this case, is support for neutrality. The Government wants instead to vote for its own hollow position. I tabled this amendment because I want the Government TDs, including Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Independent Members, to say to us that they do not support neutrality because that is the position they hold. I will go into that in more detail.

I will use my remaining time to talk about the narrative the Government is putting forth in this area, which is comprised of myths. I propose to bust a few of those myths with the aim of countering some of what I am hearing from that side of the House. The word I want to use is one my late dad was really fond of and that is "bolloxology". I hope the Chair will pardon my language. The rationale for the Government's stance does not make any sense. It is important to pick apart some of the myths it tries to hold. When we do so, we see they mean nothing. There is nothing in them.

The first myth is that the Government is only trying to reform the triple lock. The Fianna Fáil manifesto spoke about seeking sensible reform. The Fine Gael manifesto did not even mention reform of the triple lock. Since then, the Government has said it is putting forward a defence (amendment) Bill to enable a shift from having a mechanism that does not work towards an approach based on the principles of the UN Charter. Of course, there is no legal comparison between adhering to the principles of the UN Charter versus the actual legal mechanism of the triple lock. It is like going before a judge and acknowledging guilt of a crime but proposing to interpret the law as one sees fit. It is just meaningless. The principles of the UN Charter are important but they do not serve the purpose served by the triple lock. That is why it was baked into legislation. The claim that the Government is only trying to reform the triple lock is the first myth we need to bust. In fact, it is trying to completely remove it, as is clear from its proposed Bill and the debates that have happened to date.

The second myth is that the triple lock is not central to our neutrality. We have heard from multiple members of the Government on this point.

I see that great quote from the Taoiseach has aged as well as a Trump tweet does in saying the triple lock is core to our neutrality. I will read some of the similar things he said from around that time. He said, "It appears Fine Gael is arguing Ireland is failing in its European responsibilities and is allowing Russia and China to have a vote over our peacekeeping activities." This is the very same argument the Taoiseach still holds. He said, "This is nothing more than an out of touch ideological obsession on the part of Fine Gael which ignores the fact of Ireland's international standing." That captures what a lot of us are trying to get across. We punch above our weight in diplomacy, human rights and the values we hold around solidarity and social justice. That is where we are good. We cannot compete with the military might of other European and global powers. We never have been, and never will be, able to.

The triple lock is what serves us in allowing ourselves to be militarily active, to have Óglaigh na hÉireann and to allow them to engage in peacekeeping. We have the longest-standing unbroken peacekeeping record of any country in the world. All of it has been done under the Blue Helmet and Blue Beret. That is what the Government is trying to take away. That is what it is saying is militarily neutral.

The third myth I want to bust is that Europe is not on a path to militarisation. One of the Minister's colleagues, the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, went apoplectic a couple of weeks ago when I suggested that in another debate and said I was scaremongering, fearmongering and causing concern among people. I cannot understand how the Minister can stand here and say we are not on the path towards militarisation. We have appointed a European Defence Commissioner who talks about a European defence union, and not covertly but completely openly. We have completely diverted European funding towards military spending and away from social cohesion. We made changes to the multi-annual financial framework which means

those countries that have an arms industry will benefit the most from the future of European Union finance. That means the bigger countries, the ones which do not need it as much, are now going to be getting, and benefitting from, European funding. This also means those businesses which are not contributing to the defence space are also going to find it harder. On the idea that Europe is not on a path towards militarisation, the Government cannot hold these positions. They are nonsense. We can all see it with our own eyes. To suggest the Government is only trying to reform the triple lock, it is not central to our neutrality anyway and Europe is not on a path towards militarisation, if we start to cut those pillars out from underneath the Minister's argument, we get to the final one which is that the Minister says the Government continues to support Irish neutrality. That is the guts of this statement and I suspect what we were going to hear from the Minister, Deputy McEntee. I cannot think of enough examples to say why that does not hold water anymore besides the Defence Act and what the Minister is putting forward as the abolition of the triple lock.

We have seen the Government cosy up to NATO and the former Minister for Defence talk about the purchase of weapons above what many have talked about are the absolutely urgent issues of reforming and improving terms and conditions for our military personnel. The Government has absolutely trounced any neutrality in terms of our airspace and airports in allowing the use of our airspace and Shannon Airport to transport arms and personnel for other military powers. The Government cannot hold that it stands for military neutrality when all it has done since it has been in government and during previous terms is chip away at that neutrality. What this Defence Act and the removal of the triple lock will do is put a final nail in the coffin of Irish neutrality. We on the Opposition benches will not let that happen. We are going to fight tooth and nail for this along with the Irish people.

All of this brings me to one of the things that irks me most about this argument is the Minister talks about sovereignty and says our sovereignty is under threat because of the veto of the UN Security Council. I know the UN Security Council and the UN more broadly needs reform. I totally accept that; we all do. However, when the Minister talks about that sovereignty, it absolutely undermines the meaning of the word, which is under threat in Gaza and Ukraine, and which can be protected by the upholding of the international global order which is what the Government is trying to walk away from by removing the triple lock. Removing the triple lock is not just signing a piece of paper; it is saying to the UN and smaller nations across the globe that we are done with multilateralism and we are going to retreat to our regional bloc and work with Europe because we are into the whole militarisation game it is pushing and we do not believe anymore that our benefit to the world is in the space of human rights, solidarity and social justice. For me, the question around sovereignty is another myth that we need to bust.

Finally, the triple lock is emblematic of that sovereignty because it is what the Irish people said they wanted in the Nice and Lisbon treaties when they knew that this day would come when we would be pulled towards a European defence union. I ask the Minister to put it to the people, just as this motion sets out.

Deputy Paul Lawless: Neutrality and our triple lock is a serious element of our defence and foreign policy. Indeed, Irish people widely support our neutrality and are proud of it. I want to clearly say to the Minister that if she and the Government want to remove the triple lock, put it to the people by means of a referendum.

Promises may not mean much to many Government politicians and, indeed, promises mean very little it seems to Fianna Fáil but to the rest of the country, promises matter. Fianna Fáil assured the public in 2009 that the triple lock would be maintained in order to pass the Nice treaty. Assurances were given to the Irish people. The triple lock was, therefore, essentially passed indirectly through a referendum. Now Fianna Fáil and, indeed, Fine Gael want to remove it. The triple lock will remove the UN Security Council veto, meaning the deployment of our Defence Forces will be effectively in the hands of two political parties. Increasingly in those two political parties, backbenchers are not listened to, particularly in Fianna Fáil. We are essentially giving control of our Defence Forces to two political leaders. That is what this is ultimately going to lead to.

The context of this is very significant. Europe is on a path to militarisation and is rearming. European funding has been and is being directed away from social funding, agriculture and other areas and into rearming. It is increasingly going to be spent on guns and bombs. That is the truth.

The ironically named "safe regulation" under the "ReArm Europe" plan offers Ireland incredible financial flexibility in terms of purchasing missiles. It is money for bombs. Where is the money and flexibility to address the housing crisis in the country? The Common Agricultural Policy, CAP, budget is going to see a significant cut as a result of this. If the Minister wants to see the triple lock gone and is so confident the Government has the support of the Irish people, put it to them by means of a referendum.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: There is a lot of emotive debate over this issue. The Irish people have consistently spoken out in terms of wanting to preserve our neutrality. In terms of Ukraine, for example, we have been keen to emphasise we are militarily neutral. As my Labour Party colleagues mentioned earlier, what we do not have is the military capacity to defend ourselves in any way, shape or form, or to patrol our coastlines. I note the Government is talking about investing in remote control-type of weaponry. We should be paying our Defence Forces more. They do a great job, and we should be trying to get more personnel on board.

As a neutral country - and I wholeheartedly support Ireland's neutrality policy - we should have the capabilities to at least create a strong deterrent. Equally, from a geopolitical perspective, there is a huge risk from the likes of Russia in our economic zone in terms of undersea cables. The UN Security Council is not fit for purpose.

I agree with the Government about that. I also note that the defence (amendment) Bill will require that any overseas operations would still be grounded in the principles of the UN Charter and international humanitarian law, even without a formal UN resolution. However, we cannot just have a double lock. We still need a triple lock. If the Government gets rid of the UN Security Council element because it is not fit for purpose, we will need an 80% Dáil resolution and-or the ability to hold a referendum in some situations. There is scope for having up to 60 military personnel without any kind of requirement to go to the Dáil, but for larger scale operations we need a triple lock of sorts and it should be an 80% Dáil majority, a referendum or both.

Deputy Michael Collins: Independent Ireland supports Deputy Stanley's motion. Some people in politics today are trying to paint neutrality as old-fashioned, outdated or somehow

weak. The people of Ireland do not see it that way at all. The people understand neutrality because it is about independence. It is about Ireland making its own decisions, not taking orders from Brussels or NATO and not being dragged into conflicts that are not ours.

For generations, neutrality has served this country well. We are a small nation, but we have earned respect across the world because Irish soldiers went abroad as peacekeepers, not as occupiers. Irish troops have worn the blue helmet of the UN with honour. Families across Ireland are proud of that service. Now the Government wants to tamper with the triple lock. It can dress it up whatever way it likes, but ordinary people see through it.

The triple lock is there to stop the Government of the day sending Irish troops overseas without proper checks and balances. It requires the approval of the United Nations, the Government and the Dáil. This is not some inconvenience; it is democracy. Let us not rewrite history either. When the people rejected the Nice treaty, and later the Lisbon treaty, neutrality was one of the biggest concerns raised. The Government of the day came back to the people with solemn guarantees that neutrality and the triple lock would be respected. Now years later, the Government wants to quietly row back on those commitments again, without ever asking the people. That is wrong. If the Government truly believes the Irish people wants to abandon neutrality, it should have the courage to put the removal of the triple lock to a referendum. Let the Irish people decide our future, not the rest of the world.

Independent Ireland strongly believes we can support and strengthen our Defence Forces while remaining proudly neutral. Those two things are not contradictory. Our Naval Service needs ships, our airspace needs protection, our soldiers deserve proper pay and conditions and our Defence Forces need investment after years of neglect, but strengthening our Defence Forces' capability is a very different thing from dragging Ireland closer and closer to European military structures. People in Ireland understand this clearly. They do not want Irish neutrality chipped away bit by bit while politicians in Dublin pretend nothing is changing. Neutrality is not a weakness. It has kept Ireland independent and allowed Ireland to speak with credibility on the world stage and to act as peacekeepers and humanitarians. Once this independence is surrendered, it will not be easy to get it back. Independent Ireland stands firmly with the Irish people on this issue. We should protect the triple lock and neutrality and, above all else, trust the people enough to let them have their say.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: Independent Ireland was set up for one reason: to give a platform for Independents to work together. What is the difference between Independent Ireland and Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael? We have a vote of conscience. Whether to remove the triple lock is a vote of conscience. It is a vote for the people of Ireland. It should not be up to the Government party leaders. Anything such as removing the triple lock should be an open vote in this House for Government parties at a minimum. The Government no longer fully represents of Ireland. It should look at its numbers. At the recent protests when people came out what happened? The Government talked down to the real people of Ireland and ignored them. It no longer represents the people of Ireland as a whole.

Neutrality is not a weakness. It is independence. Do we need to invest in the Defence Forces? 100%. Do we need to ensure our Defence Forces can protect the country? 100%. However, we also need to hear the voice of every person in the country on any removal of the triple lock. It is not something the Government should have control of. That is why

Independent Ireland put a vote of conscience into its constitution. While we in Independent Ireland might agree on 90% of issues, we will never agree on 10%. It allows members of the party to make individual choices because they represent different parts of the country and different people in their areas. That is the difference between Independent Ireland and Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The Government parties are told what to do. Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir. That is what they go with. Why not recognise the people of Ireland and let them make the decision on whether there is to be any alteration of our neutrality? Any alteration to the triple lock is a choice for the people to make, not for the Government. Why not recognise the people of Ireland and let them make a decision about whether there will be any alteration?

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: First, I thank Deputy Stanley for bringing forward this timely and important motion to allow us to say what we want in Dáil Éireann regarding neutrality. It is most important that we retain our neutrality and the triple lock. If the Government wants to change it, by all means it should put it to the people of Ireland. It should put it to the country. There is nothing to be afraid of. At all times, the people of Ireland have given their opinions on the different referendums put before them and we in this Chamber duly had to recognise the voice of the people. That is what we have waited for here.

Back in 2013, then Deputy Micheál Martin - he is now our Taoiseach - suggested we could not or would not get rid of the triple lock. The only difference between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael at that time was that Fine Gael was apparently in favour of getting rid of the triple lock and Fianna Fáil was not. If Fianna Fáil wants to change that, it means the two parties will more or less unite and be one party because there will be no difference between them, in my eyes anyway.

De Valera stood up to Churchill in during the Second World War. As a young fella I listened to his speech. England had oppressed us for more than 800 years and he told Churchill where to go. De Valera was not taking his dictation when he was asked to forgo neutrality and get involved in the war and open the ports for England. I and many people will forever thank de Valera for that stance, for standing up to the powers of the world at the time and holding our neutrality.

I thank our peacekeeping forces for all the work they have done in different conflicts across-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): Go raibh maith agat.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: -----the world. I certainly do not want to see a European army we are part of.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I too thank Deputy Stanley for bringing forward this motion this morning. My position is clear: the triple lock is sacrosanct. Ireland's policy on neutrality is equally sacrosanct and remains a vital cornerstone of our approach to defence and international engagement. I too compliment our peacekeepers who have worked all over the world in very dangerous situations over the decades.

Following the initial rejection of the Nice treaty, the Government gave explicit assurances to the Irish people ahead of the second referendum. These assurances included the Seville

Declarations on the Treaty of Nice which safeguarded Irish neutrality and incorporated a requirement for UN authorisation in the triple lock. That was a promise made to the people. Do we have any respect for what the people were promised? We seem not to. To remove this requirement now would represent the reversal of a commitment made to the Irish people in 2002. Therefore, any proposal to replace it with a broader or alternative international mandate should most definitely be put to the Irish people. The people are sacrosanct and sovereign here, and they should make the decision.

It is often portrayed in media coverage that there is strong public support for maintaining the triple lock.

The majority of the Irish people believe in preserving this safeguard. As a sovereign nation, it is the Irish people who should decide whether such a fundamental change is made. The Government argues that a referendum is neither required nor necessary because it is afraid of a referendum and the people. The Taoiseach, Deputy Martin, went on a roadshow some years ago to Cork, Donegal and God knows where else – it was a nice ready-up with a hand-picked chairperson - to try to ready the people for change. It is a democratic decision of the people and nothing else.

Failure to recognise or act on principles suggests two things. The first is that the Government may lack confidence that the electorate would support its position and the second is that it is unwilling to allow people to have their say on an issue of such great importance to the Irish people. I listened to much of the debate. The Opposition is in unison as regards the position. The Government should listen to that and take heed of democratic accountability to this House.

Deputy Catherine Callaghan: I stand in this Chamber today as the only person in the Thirty-fourth Dáil who has served in Óglaigh na hÉireann and the only current Deputy who has signed the oath of allegiance, the same oath of allegiance that all members of the Defence Forces sign. When we sign, we say we will only obey lawful orders. Lawful orders are orders that are fully and wholly in alignment and accordance with international law. I have also served as a UN peacekeeper in southern Lebanon, protecting the citizens of southern Lebanon, the very same citizens who will still need protection once the UNIFIL operation ceases at the end of this year and Ireland's involvement with peacekeeping in the region ends due to the lack of a UN mandate.

There has not been a single UN mandate sanctioned by the UN Security Council since 2014. The system is broken. Before I go any further, it is important to be clear about something fundamental. Neutrality and the triple lock are not the same thing. Sinn Féin seems to constantly roll words like "triple lock", "neutrality" and "protection" off its tongue as if they are the same thing. This is false and misleading. The triple lock does not guarantee our neutrality. We are neutral as a country because we choose to be neutral. There is no desire, discussion or intention of changing our neutrality and any assertion to the contrary from the Opposition benches is unfounded.

Neutrality is a long-standing policy of independence about how Ireland chooses to conduct itself in the world. The triple lock describes the three-step process we use to come to a decision as to where we deploy our peacekeeping troops, but the real truth lies in the fact that the decision as to which UN missions are suitable for our troops is decided in the first part of the

triple lock. It is decided in line with our policy of neutrality and the commitment to obeying international laws.

When deployments are being considered, the first step for the Government is to seek the advice of senior and experienced members of the Defence Forces, the men and women I mentioned at the beginning of my contribution, who are beholden to obeying international law, alongside the Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs and Trade. It is at this stage that a peacekeeping mission's suitability is established. Missions will not be approved unless they are in line with Ireland's values, including our policy of neutrality. There has never been an incident where a Government has gone against military advice about the suitability of a mission for Irish personnel. This is our autonomy and sovereign decision of the State. Ireland was neutral long before the triple lock. We will be neutral after the triple lock is amended.

Deputy Barry Heneghan: Gabhaim buíochas le gach Ball a labhair ar an rún seo. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta Gibney as an leasú a chuir sí chun tosaigh. Nuair atá muid ag éisteacht leis an bpobal, tá sé sin thar a bheith important. Successive polls have shown a consistent majority in favour of neutrality. When we are discussing the triple lock, we need to be clear what it entails. I agree with an Teachta Callaghan about listening to the Defence Forces, but from my own research – the Minister can correct me if I am wrong – I understand one cannot survey current Defence Forces personnel on their opinion on removing legislation. Perhaps their spouses and children could be surveyed to see what they think.

If there is a specific peacekeeping mission and genuine humanitarian emergency where the Defence Forces are needed, and the UN Security Council is being vetoed - it has vetoed multiple peacekeeping missions for many reasons under P5 - then we should introduce emergency legislation, make a case and bring a Bill to the House. We have introduced emergency legislation on previous occasions. Right now, there is no clear reason to do this. It is as if we are trying to create a deterrent. That is what we should be doing. It is not acceptable. If we are going to do this and are confident that the Irish people want this, we should have a referendum.

The Minister will give me lenience to bring her attention to the Global Sumud Flotilla. Michael Cullen, a good friend of mine, was on the flotilla yesterday while his peaceful humanitarian boat was shot at. I was on a flotilla and have seen the brutal way the IOF treats people. I ask for an update from the Minister's Department. Michael's sister was watching the live stream when she heard shots being fired and the feed went dark. She did not know where he was. Having seen the treatment of our ambassador when I was in prison, we need to do everything we can and stand up to people who are committing war crimes and genocide. We have an obligation. I welcome the acknowledgement last week on the work that is being done in the Department on the Occupied Territories Bill and I would love an update.

Minister for Defence (Deputy Helen McEntee): At the outset, I want to join many colleagues in acknowledging the exceptional service of the men and women of the Defence Forces currently deployed overseas. As we know, their work in peacekeeping missions often takes place in challenging and dangerous environments, as demonstrated most particularly in south Lebanon, and continues to reflect our enduring commitment to international peace and security. I am deeply conscious, not least because I met many of those members and their

families in recent weeks, of the sacrifice they and their families make in serving their country and advancing the cause of peace.

I fully recognise the strong public interest in and deep attachment to Ireland's neutrality, as well as the strength of feeling it continues to generate. I also acknowledge that there are genuine concerns and, in some cases, misunderstandings regarding the impact the proposed amendments to the Defence Acts, including changes to the provision commonly referred to as the triple lock, may have on Ireland's policy of military neutrality. Just a few seconds ago, we heard from a Deputy who said Ireland should not be dictated to by other countries while at the same time saying that we do not need to amend the triple lock, the very thing that allows other countries like the US, China and Russia to dictate exactly what we do.

Let me be absolutely clear. Ireland's long-standing policy in regard to our neutrality remains unchanged. We do not participate in military alliances or mutual defence arrangements and I am being very clear when I say there are no plans by the Government to alter the position. That commitment has been made repeatedly on the floor of the House and I again explicitly reaffirm it today.

I want to again address a fundamental misconception at the heart of the motion before the House. The triple lock is not a defining feature of our neutrality. It is not set out in Bunreacht na hÉireann and it is not a constitutional requirement. Rather, it is a legislative mechanism grounded in the Defence Act. It governs the dispatch of Defence Forces personnel overseas, primarily in the context of UN-mandated missions. The triple lock evolved from political commitments during the Nice and Lisbon treaties process and we all accept that. I disagree with the idea that we would not have a discussion many years later in a space where we have elected representatives who represent all of our constituencies and are living in a changed global environment. It is not a constitutional principle. This is an opportunity for all of us, as elected representatives, to discuss the situation we find ourselves in. It is quite simple. We cannot operate in certain missions or certain missions that are due to end because of our triple lock. Amending the legislation underpinning this does not require a referendum. I am fully of the view that such a proposal would be neither necessary nor proportionate in terms of what we are discussing.

The Government is committed to progressing the defence (amendment) Bill, the general scheme of which was approved on 4 March. This legislation will consolidate and update existing provisions relating to overseas deployments and will modernise the framework in which such decisions are made. It will be reflective of the current global security environment, an environment in which no new peacekeeping mission has been proposed since 2014. Due to the veto of other countries, since 2014 we and UN peacekeeping missions have been blocked from progressing. The core objective of the legislative reforms proposed is to strengthen our ability to pursue an independent foreign policy and to allow us to make our own decisions in terms of deploying our own troops.

Crucially, it will ensure that decisions regarding the deployment of Defence Forces personnel overseas to peacekeeping missions are determined solely by the Government and Dáil Éireann, the sovereign representatives of the Irish people, rather than being subject to the veto of the permanent members of the UN, countries like the US, China and Russia, countries that are actually involved in conflicts-----

Deputy Brian Stanley: The US.

Deputy Helen McEntee: -----we are trying to keep peacekeeping troops on the ground for. The practical reality is that the veto power exercised or indeed threatened by permanent members of the Security Council can and does prevent action, including in circumstances where there is broad international support. For Ireland, this can create and in fact does create real and immediate consequences. In the absence of a UN mandate, deployments cannot proceed. They must cease, regardless of our position or of the will of this House.

Deputy Heneghan asked why we are doing this now. I will give examples. We know very clearly that the troops I met in Limerick a few weeks ago will be the last operational mandate or battalion sent out to southern Lebanon for a peacekeeping mission that has been *in situ* for decades. We have a very proud tradition of sending thousands of members overseas over those years to protect people and keep them safe. The dynamic has changed and it is a very difficult situation now for civilians and our troops with that mission ending by next year. We will have no mandate to be able to support the people on the ground. We heard Deputy Callaghan speak and, like her, every peacekeeping troop or member of the Defence Forces I have met wants to continue that operation on the ground. That will not be possible.

I will mention as another example Operation IRINI, which is an EU-led mission in the Mediterranean. We have our own troops on that mission. That is coming to an end on Sunday. It is not being renewed. We will not be able to keep our troops there as part of any new mission that is being progressed. This is what we are trying to do. We have members of the Defence Forces who train, are highly skilled and are highly experienced. As missions are not being renewed because the UN Security Council is not operating in the way it should - we all know that - we are having to take back our troops and we are not able to continue the fantastic work we are so proud they have been doing for so many years.

The legislative changes I am proposing will address this issue directly. It will remove the requirement for the UN mandate as part of the decision-making framework while retaining robust safeguards. People want to know that there will be robust safeguards; that there will be Government approval and Dáil approval, where appropriate; and that this will continue to be required. All deployments will remain fully consistent with international law and with the principles of the UN Charter. Under these reforms we can continue to participate in missions such as Operation IRINI, which I have just mentioned. It is coming to an end and we will no longer be able to be part of it.

On the question of any further potential missions in south Lebanon - I know our troops want to continue their work there - if the EU or any other regional organisation proposes such a mission, the House can decide to be part of that. I think that is a role the House should take on.

I emphasise that even though the reforms to the triple lock legislation are often portrayed as altering our neutrality, they will not change our neutrality. I will repeat what Deputy Callaghan said: we were a neutral country before the triple lock was introduced. Amending it does not change the fact that we are a neutral country. The reforms do not signal any move towards participation in military alliances, nor would they do anything to expeditionary operations or diminish our commitment to the UN or to multilateralism. On the contrary, we will continue to regard the principles of the UN Charter as the foundation of our international engagement

and we will actively support efforts to strengthen and reform the multilateral system. I have briefed and engaged directly with Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, on our intended approach. Our position and our ongoing commitment to the UN are well understood within the UN system, just as our peacekeepers are highly valued and appreciated. The UN does not see this as Ireland pulling away from the UN. This does not come across, nor does the UN believe that this is Ireland pulling away. The UN understands the need for us to be able to deploy our troops and to support the many missions they feel they cannot support because of the veto. Ireland's reputation as a peace-builder and as a contributor to conflict resolution, peacekeeping, human rights and disarmament is well established and will continue to guide our approach.

We have all touched on the security environment. We can see that it is different from previous decades. We are witnessing increased geopolitical tensions, a weakening of established multilateral mechanisms in certain instances and the emergence of new and complex threats that do not respect national borders. Against that backdrop, it is both prudent and necessary that we ensure our legislative and policy frameworks remain fit for purpose. This includes ensuring the State has the capacity to respond in a timely and effective manner to emerging crises, whether they arise from conflict situations, humanitarian emergencies or risks to Irish citizens abroad. The ability to act when required and in line with our values is an essential component of a credible and responsible foreign and defence policy. Our participation in overseas missions, whether it is under the auspices of the United Nations, the European Union or other regional arrangements, has always been grounded in clear legal authority and a principled commitment to peacekeeping and conflict resolution. Nothing in the legislative proposals alters that fundamental position. Rather, what is being proposed is a pragmatic adjustment to ensure Ireland is not unduly constrained in circumstances where international consensus may be blocked for reasons completely unrelated to the merits of a particular mission. They may be completely unrelated, and we have seen that happen. In such situations it is reasonable that we retain our sovereign capacity to determine our own course of action, subject to the appropriate democratic oversight.

Our international reputation, as we all agree, has been built over many decades and it is one of consistency, independence and willingness to contribute constructively in support of peace and stability. Our Defence Forces personnel are widely respected for their professionalism, their integrity and their dedication in challenging environments. Ensuring we can continue to deploy such personnel, where justified and where appropriate, is in keeping with that proud tradition. By next year, there will be hundreds of troops who will not be able to participate in a UN peacekeeping mission in southern Lebanon in a way we have done for decades. This is because of the triple lock. What we are proposing here is to make sure we can continue to deploy our troops.

I will touch on one other point.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): Go raibh maith agat. The time is up.

Deputy Helen McEntee: Some commentary has been made on our investment in defence and in security. Being a neutral country does not mean that we should not invest in our capabilities to defend ourselves or that we should not be able to engage with other countries so

that we are working collectively together. That does not in any way impact on our military neutrality.

Deputy Seamus Healy: I welcome and support this motion and thank Deputy Stanley for bringing it forward. I want to address some remarks to Fianna Fáil TDs, Fianna Fáil Senators and the wider Fianna Fáil membership. Is Fianna Fáil going to abandon its history? Is Fianna Fáil going to abandon Bunreacht na hÉireann, Éamon de Valera's Constitution? Is Fianna Fáil going to abandon Éamon de Valera's declaration of neutrality? Is Fianna Fáil going to abandon the solemn national declaration given by a Taoiseach from that party, Bertie Ahern, during the second referendum on the Nice treaty? Is it going to abandon the solemn national declaration given by another Fianna Fáil Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, during the second referendum on the Lisbon treaty?

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: No.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Is it going to abandon people like Éamon Ó Cuív and Willie O'Dea who are on record as opposing the abolition of the triple lock? The Minister has said that there is no connection between the triple lock and Irish neutrality but as we very well know, the current Taoiseach told us previously that the triple lock is the core of Irish neutrality. These are huge questions for Fianna Fáil, and for its future. Will they abandon their history?

Irish neutrality goes back hundreds of years. It is part of what we are as a nation and as a people. It goes back to Wolfe Tone. It goes back to James Connolly when he erected the banner on Liberty Hall which said "We serve neither king nor kaiser, but Ireland!". It goes back to huge protests against conscription during the First World War. It goes back to Article 29.2 of Bunreacht na hÉireann - Éamon de Valera's Constitution - in which "Ireland affirms its adherence to the principle of the pacific settlement of international disputes by international arbitration or judicial determination."

The triple lock itself was endorsed by the sovereign Irish people in two referendums: the second Nice treaty referendum and the second Lisbon treaty referendum. The triple lock was included in solemn national declarations in those treaties. Any question of changing the triple lock will require a referendum of the Irish people. What is the Government afraid of in putting this to a referendum? The Irish people have spoken twice on this issue and have supported the triple lock. Any change will require a referendum, so this should be put to the people.

12 o'clock

Deputy Brian Stanley: I acknowledge the work of Irish peacekeepers in Lebanon and in other missions overseas, particularly those serving in Lebanon currently given the actions of the terrorist Israeli State. I also acknowledge the work of volunteers who have campaigned and continue to campaign to uphold neutrality. I thank all those from the Opposition benches who spoke on it this morning. I note that not one Fianna Fáil Deputy has darkened the door to come in and to defend what is being proposed here. That is interesting and speaks for itself.

The motion calls on the Government to uphold the policy of neutrality and the triple lock as set out in the Defence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1960 and the solemn national declarations attached to the Nice and Lisbon treaties; to recognise that these commitments regarding the

triple lock and neutrality can only be changed or amended by a majority of the electorate in a referendum; to recognise that the triple lock and neutrality are intrinsically linked, as set out by Micheál Martin; to strengthen the State's policy of neutrality by bringing forward a referendum to enshrine it in the Constitution. If the Minister really believes in it, which she said a number of times, enshrine it in the Constitution; to work with other neutral and non-aligned countries to reform and re-establish the primacy of the UN as the forum to uphold international law and for resolving international disputes and conflicts; to abide by the principal of multilateralism and not allow the State to become part of any regional force; and to halt plans to progress the Defence (Amendment) Bill 2025, which is about abandoning neutrality, and respect the will of the people.

Being neutral does not inhibit us in any way from having a level of co-operation with other states. Being neutral does not stop us from enhancing and modernising our Defence Forces and the protecting the likes of undersea cables. It does not stop us from increasing the numbers in the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service or having modern equipment. It is the Government parties that have presided over the running down of the Defence Forces. I welcome the fact that some money is being invested in them and there have been some improvements but there is a lot more to do. Poor pay and conditions and lack of investment have been at the core of the problem. Next Tuesday night at 8 p.m., there will be a meeting on neutrality in the parish centre in Portlaoise. I am just getting in that plug with the indulgence of the Ceann Comhairle.

Who are the people sent to war? They are not the sons and daughters of the militarists. It is the working class that is sent to the front line. The arms industry in Europe, led by Germany, is banging the war drums but, of course, we have cohorts banging the war drums at home. There have been over 50 articles in the media calling for the abandonment of the triple lock, with hardly any articles putting forward the counter position. Week after week, we hear from people like Brigid Laffan, Dan O'Brien, Dan Mulhall, John O'Brien and Ben Tonra banging the war drum and churning out the propaganda that we must abolish the triple lock and abandon our policy of neutrality. A conditioning process is happening to convince people to transfer money away from spending on agriculture, social cohesion and important matters like health, education and housing and use that money to buy guns. Brigid Laffan was very clear about it. When she was asked what she meant by Brendan O'Connor recently, she said that it is about guns.

The Minister said here a number of times, and told me and a number of members at the defence committee, that we are not going to join NATO but we do not have to join it. The boys and girls at the top of NATO know this. Why do they know this? It is because the Government is already joining in and signing up to joint missions and partnerships with all sorts of names and terms used as a cover for participating and being aligned with NATO. That is the reality. That is the conditioning process.

We are supposed to be neutral. I remember being at Shannon Airport. The one and only time I was there was in 2008 and I was horrified to see the number of American troops in American Army uniforms going through the airport and the military overflights. The Government at the time signed up to allow this. We cannot allow that to continue in light of the slaughter that happened in Iraq and Iran. We facilitated flights into and out of Shannon and flights over Ireland on military missions. That has to stop.

We recently gave €90 million in aid to Ukraine. I support the €60 million for humanitarian purposes but I do not support the €30 million that was given to buy guns and bombs. You are firing guns and bombs into what is already an industrial war. That is the only way you could describe it. It is like trying to put out a fire by throwing petrol on it. A neutral country cannot do that. The boys and girls at the top of NATO are not worried because they already have the Government.

Wolfe Tone was the first to enunciate Irish neutrality. Some 110 years ago, James Connolly hung a banner over Liberty Hall that read "We Serve Neither King Nor Kaiser But Ireland!" This is not about being isolationist. It is about us being a peaceful country, using our voice as an independent neutral country to stand up for what is right in a world run by bullies such as Trump and Putin and the terrorist State of Israel. I express my solidarity with the people who have been kidnapped by Israel and I urge the Government to take the strongest possible action. If it sees the Israeli ambassador, tell them to go home as soon as possible. It should expel the ambassador. They should be expelled and we should pass the sanctions Bill today to stop any trade with Israel. It is a disgrace that we co-operate in any way with it. We should continue our role as a peace-keeping country.

Amendment No. 1 to amendment No. 1 put.

An Ceann Comhairle: In accordance with Standing Order 85(2), the division is deferred until tonight's voting bloc.

Message from Select Committee

An Ceann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration has completed its consideration of the Criminal Law, Civil Law and Defence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026, changed from the Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026, and has made amendments thereto and has amended the Title to read as follows:

AN ACT TO AMEND THE FIREARMS ACT 1925 AND THE PRISONS ACT 2007 IN RELATION TO THE POSSESSION, USE OR CARRIAGE OF INCAPACITANT SPRAY BY PRISON OFFICERS AND TO AMEND THE FIREARMS ACT 1925 IN RELATION TO THE SEIZURE AND DETENTION OF FIREARMS OR AMMUNITION BY AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA IN THE INTEREST OF PUBLIC SAFETY, SECURITY OR PEACE; TO AMEND THE COURTS OF JUSTICE ACT 1936, THE COURTS SERVICE ACT 1998 AND THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL ACT 2019 IN RELATION TO CERTAIN NONJUDICIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE CHIEF JUSTICE; TO AMEND THE DEFENCE ACT 1954 TO PROVIDE FOR CERTAIN POWERS OF THE DEFENCE FORCES IN RELATION TO SAFEGUARDING, PROTECTING AND DEFENDING THE SECURITY OF THE STATE, THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE DEFENCE FORCES IN AID OF THE CIVIL POWER, AND THE PROTECTION OF MILITARY INSTALLATIONS BY THE DEFENCE FORCES; TO PROVIDE FOR A POWER OF PROVISIONAL ARREST WITHOUT WARRANT IN RELATION TO EXTRADITION REQUESTS IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES AND FOR THAT AND OTHER PURPOSES TO AMEND THE EXTRADITION ACT 1965; TO MAKE FURTHER PROVISION IN RELATION TO

COMMUNITY SERVICE ORDERS AND FOR THAT PURPOSE TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE (COMMUNITY SERVICE) ACT 1983; TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL EVIDENCE ACT 1992 AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT 1999 IN RELATION TO EVIDENCE IN CERTAIN PROCEEDINGS; TO MAKE FURTHER PROVISION IN RELATION TO CERTIFICATION OF CITIZENSHIP IN CERTAIN PROCEEDINGS AND FOR THAT PURPOSE TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE (THEFT AND FRAUD OFFENCES) ACT 2001, THE MARITIME SECURITY ACT 2004, THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT ACT 2006, THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE (MONEY LAUNDERING AND TERRORIST FINANCING) ACT 2010 AND THE EUROPEAN UNION (MARKET ABUSE) REGULATIONS 2016; TO AMEND THE EUROPEAN ARREST WARRANT ACT 2003 TO GIVE FURTHER EFFECT TO COUNCIL FRAMEWORK DECISION OF 13 JUNE 2002 ON THE EUROPEAN ARREST WARRANT AND THE SURRENDER PROCEDURES BETWEEN MEMBER STATES, AS AMENDED BY COUNCIL FRAMEWORK DECISION OF 26 FEBRUARY 2009 AMENDING FRAMEWORK DECISIONS 2002/584/JHA, 2005/214/JHA, 2006/783/JHA, 2008/909/JHA AND 2008/947/JHA THEREBY ENHANCING THE PROCEDURAL RIGHTS OF PERSONS AND FOSTERING THE APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF MUTUAL RECOGNITION TO DECISIONS RENDERED IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PERSON CONCERNED AT THE TRIAL; TO MAKE FURTHER PROVISION IN RELATION TO DNA PROFILES AND FOR THAT PURPOSE TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE (FORENSIC EVIDENCE AND DNA DATABASE SYSTEM) ACT 2014; TO MAKE PROVISION FOR OFFENCES RELATING TO ACCOMMODATION OFFERED IN EXCHANGE FOR SEXUAL ACTIVITY AND FOR THAT PURPOSE TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL LAW (SEXUAL OFFENCES) ACT 2017; TO MAKE PROVISION FOR THE LICENSING OF OUTDOOR SEATING AREAS OF LICENSED PREMISES IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES AND FOR TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR CERTAIN OUTDOOR SEATING AREAS TEMPORARILY LICENSED UNDER THE CIVIL LAW (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT 2021; TO MAKE FURTHER PROVISION IN RESPECT OF ORDERS RELATING TO ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND FOR THAT AND OTHER PURPOSES TO AMEND THE CHILDREN ACT 2001 AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT 2006; TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL PROCEDURE ACT 1967, THE CIVIL LEGAL AID ACT 1995, THE BAIL ACT 1997, THE MULTI-UNIT DEVELOPMENTS ACT 2011, THE PRISONS ACT 2015, THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE (MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF CUSTODIAL SENTENCES) ACT 2023 AND THE JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS COMMISSION ACT 2023; AND TO PROVIDE FOR RELATED MATTERS.

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The latest *daft.ie* rent report was published this morning. The consequences of the Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil rent hike Bill are now laid bare. Rents have hit their highest level in 25 years and are increasing at the fastest rate since records began and evictions are at their highest level since the Famine. This is devastating for renters. The rent rule changes announced by the Government last summer and introduced on 1 March are a disaster. What these massive rent hikes mean in real terms is that in Dublin, renting a two-bed

apartment will cost you an eye-watering €30,000 per year. In Galway city, where rents have shot up by 18%, a two-bed will set you back €27,000 in rent per year.

Is it any wonder that there is so much anger and despair among young families in Galway - people who are desperately trying to put an affordable roof over their heads? Who in God's name can afford these rents? Can ordinary workers, families or young people afford them? They do not have a hope. They do not stand a chance. How does the Government expect people to live? How does it expect young people to save for their own home? The Government has knowingly caused this nightmare with its rent hike bill. The *daft.ie* report calls it out in black and white. It states that "the ability to reset rents between tenancies appears to have led to a step-change in rents, with the largest quarterly increase in rents on record." This report includes only the first month of the Government's disastrous legislation, so renters will now be terrified that there is much worse to come.

I warned the Taoiseach that the Government's Bill would open the floodgates to massive rent increases but he refused to listen. In fact, he told me that I was wrong. The biggest corporate landlord in the country also told the Government.

They boasted brazenly to investors that the Government's legislation allowed them to jack up their rents by extortionate amounts but the Government pushed ahead, intent on lining the pockets of the corporate landlords, big developers and vulture funds and utterly indifferent to the consequences for renters, families and ordinary people. Today, however, the Taoiseach has nowhere to hide. We now see the consequences of his actions as plain as day, with record rents, record evictions, families with nowhere to go, young people forced to choose between paying crippling rent, moving back in with their families or emigrating, and stress, worry and panic. That is what the Government has done to an entire generation and it has done it deliberately, with its eyes wide open.

Tubaiste amach is amach is ea an Bille sin a bhfuil de thoradh air go bhfuil níos mó daoine á gcur amach as a dtithe agus cíosanna níos airde ná mar a bhí riamh. Thréig an Rialtas tionóntaí chun pócaí na dtiarnaí talún móire agus na greach-chistí a líonadh.

The Government has chosen to back big landlords and punish renters. It could have cut rents, banned rent increases and put a stop to no-fault evictions, but no. With its rent hike Bill, it chose to make life better for the corporate landlords and property funds, so they laugh all their way to the bank, while the lives of families, workers, students and young people are turned upside down. What has the Taoiseach to say today to those renters who were thrown to the wolves?

Deputies: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: Rents have been too high for a long time. Why?

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Because of your Bill.

The Taoiseach: It is because there is a shortage of supply.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach to answer.

The Taoiseach: The Deputies have had their chance. With respect, they should allow democracy to take place.

Deputy Paul Donnelly: The Taoiseach had his chance.

An Ceann Comhairle: Manners, please. The Deputy's leader will respond.

The Taoiseach: The one thing I observed in the presentation by Deputy McDonald was the absence of any solution, the absence of any idea except to ban rent hikes-----

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Get rid of this Government

The Taoiseach: -----which will destroy supply. Any international organisation analysing the rental market or any property market has said time and again that rent controls or the freezing of rents just reduces supply, kills the market for the long term and will keep prices at too high a level. The Housing Commission recommended that we had to change the rental situation in terms of the rent pressure zones.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: It did not recommend that.

The Taoiseach: Again, Sinn Féin Members are interrupting and again they do not have either the manners or the cop-on to listen to some rational arguments on this question.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: At least I do not misrepresent the Housing Commission's report, as the Taoiseach has done.

The Taoiseach: With the greatest of respect, Deputy, you went off to Davy Stockbrokers. You went off to all that gang before the election and we saw the incoherence of your response.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Be honest about the commission's report.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not going to ask again. Respect the discourse of the House, on both sides.

The Taoiseach: Again, recommendations for reform came from the Housing Commission, the ESRI, and the Housing Agency.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Not for this reform.

The Taoiseach: The bottom line was this. What was in place could not be sustained. Equally, it is about supply-----

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Can we sustain the current evictions and homelessness figures?

The Taoiseach: In terms of our proposals and what is happening, we had 36,000 additional houses last year. Supply ultimately will moderate rent increases.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: When?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ó Broin, your party leader asked the question. You are not special.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Will it be in three years, four years or six years?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ó Broin, do you have a special dispensation that I am unaware of? Please allow the answer to the question your Leader has asked.

The Taoiseach: *Daft.ie* data is asking prices. It is not the complete data set for the entire rental market in the country. Deputies should know that. That is the bottom line. The asking prices are usually greater than usual. The Central Statistics Office, in its monthly change analysis, showed a figure of 0.3% in quarter 1 of 2026. The Residential Tenancies Board covers the entire population of tenancies, which is about 246,000. With *daft.ie*, it could be as low as 2,300 tenancies. We have to treat the *daft.ie* data with care in terms of any proper, comprehensive analysis of the rental market. The latest RTB data shows continued growth in quarter 1 of 2026, with 246,000 tenancies. That is the highest on record. There are more tenancies and properties available.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: No, there are not. That is not true.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's party leader will respond.

The Taoiseach: There is no doubt that, with the change, there was going to be an impact on the market. There was no question about that. It was actually said at the time by various agencies. The bottom line is that there had to be certainty given to the landscape because we are spending about €9 billion of State money. The direct State intervention in the housing market is around €9 billion. The Central Bank says we need about €20 billion. We need a combination of public sector and private sector investment in housing. That means a long-term certainty in terms of the rental market. I looked at all the Opposition parties' proposals before the election and all their manifestos. They are very poor in terms of analysis.

(Interruptions)

The Taoiseach: They are very poor.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: There is not much point in this.

The Taoiseach: They are shocking.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the answer.

Deputy John Brady: The Taoiseach says that with a straight face.

The Taoiseach: All Sinn Féin offered the last time was a house without the land. Actually, Deputies may feign a laugh-----

(Interruptions)

The Taoiseach: -----but I would challenge anybody-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: We have rising rents, rising house prices and rising homelessness.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is now up to Deputy McDonald to respond. Deputies have been very disruptive.

The Taoiseach: What has been unacceptable is that there has been a deliberate attempt to interrupt and heckle.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: What is unacceptable is 7,000 children in emergency accommodation.

The Taoiseach: I did not interrupt Deputy McDonald.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is deliberate but it has been handled. The Taoiseach's time is up. I ask Deputy McDonald to respond.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: We have record rents and record house prices.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Deputy Ó Broin allow his leader to respond, unless it has changed?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Taoiseach has nowhere to hide today because the consequences of his actions are very clear. The Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil rent hike Bill has meant the highest rent hikes on record and evictions at the highest levels since the Famine. The Government has chosen deliberately to side with corporate landlords and vulture funds. Those are the Taoiseach's choices. It takes a very particular type of slíbhín to stand-----

Deputy Noel Grealish: A Cheann Comhairle-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: That is out of order.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----in this House and suggest that it is okay for families to face a rent bill of €30,000 a year in Dublin and €27,000 in Galway.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy McDonald.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: It is a very special kind of slíbhín politics from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. Shame on you.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy McDonald, your time is now up but I ask you, on behalf of the House, to withdraw the name you have just used.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: It is true.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will you withdraw that remark?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: A slíbhín is a slíbhín.

An Ceann Comhairle: You will not. That is fine.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: A rose by any other name and a slíbhín by any other name. Shame on you, Taoiseach.

An Ceann Comhairle: I have asked. Deputy McDonald, your time is up. Now you are taking advantage. Resume your seat.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That is your record, Taoiseach. Do not dare lecture the rest of us on the Opposition benches.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond, please.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: He has no response.

The Taoiseach: With the greatest respect, it is just plain stupid to go on about the greatest evictions since the Famine. That is not being serious about our housing problems.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: It is statistically correct. It is a fact.

The Taoiseach: We have a housing crisis here but all I see from the Opposition-----

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the answer.

The Taoiseach: All I see from the Opposition, Sinn Féin in particular, is empty rhetoric, no solutions and the usual sloganeering. That will not build houses. I have a document here with all the objections of those parties' representatives. They objected to housing project after housing project.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: As a party, it is not-----

The Taoiseach: I understand this is about politics and electoral politics. What I am determined to do-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: This is about homelessness. This is about renters.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ó Broin.

The Taoiseach: No, it is not.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: This is about an entire generation locked out because of your policies.

An Ceann Comhairle: I suggest we move on.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Ó Broin is empty in terms of policy formulation.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: It is about the 7,000 children you made homeless.

The Taoiseach: You are empty on substance, Deputy Ó Broin. You have no substance when it comes to housing.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you. This is absolute, total and utter disrespect.

The Taoiseach: You have no substance whatsoever and the proof of the pudding was in the last election when people did not buy your pig in a poke. You got it wrong and your party knows you got it wrong.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: That is it. I call Deputy Ivana Bacik.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: It is an absolute disgrace.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before the Deputy starts, it is incomprehensible that, as either side of the House is incapable of respecting one another's time-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: That is not true, a Cheann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: I said "one another's" in terms of respectful discourse. I am asking for co-operation to get through the business of the day. I call Deputy Ivana Bacik.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: Hear, hear.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Yesterday, I raised the plight of renters with the Taoiseach in this Chamber. I hate to say I told you so, but today's *daft.ie* report confirms the recent record surge in rents and a particularly sharp rise in Galway, proving again just how badly the Government is failing renters.

Today, I wish to raise a different matter with the Taoiseach, a serious matter, namely, the epidemic of violence against women in our country. Yesterday, former garda Paul Moody was sentenced to prison for a terrible prolonged campaign of coercive control against his partner. He has already served a three-year sentence for coercive control in respect of another woman, Nicola Hanney.

It is four months since I raised with the Taoiseach the treatment of former garda Margaret Loftus and praised her courage in telling her story of coercive control. Yet, as reported in last week's *Irish Examiner*, her former husband remains a member of the Garda. In Paul Moody's case, we read of serious failures by the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC, to take effective action when alerted to his conduct.

Yesterday, the CEO of Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Rachel Morrogh, stated that record numbers had contacted its helpline last year. At almost 24,000, it was the highest ever. There were over 7,000 first-time contacts.

Garda figures show that more than 1,000 domestic abuse reports are being made a week and official statistics represent only a fraction of the true number. Nearly 40% of victims surveyed by the Garda Síochána Inspectorate said they did not report the abuse they suffered and approximately half who did report abuse said they were dissatisfied with how they were treated.

This should stop us in our tracks. Far too many women and children across Ireland are experiencing home as not a place of safety, but a place of danger. We have made progress on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in recent years - legislating for the offence of coercive control, Coco's Law, the O'Malley report, and the establishment of Cuan and protective services units in Garda divisions - but we must do more.

I have a constructive policy call for the Taoiseach today. Front-line organisations, such as Women's Aid, tell us that financial insecurity and the housing crisis are trapping women and children in violent homes. Many victims simply cannot afford to leave and their abusers know this. That is why the Labour Party and Labour Women are proposing a €3 million safe fund for victim survivors of domestic abuse. This is a practical measure to provide fast financial support for those who desperately need an escape route. It would not be means tested and would provide help when needed, recognising that victims often have only a small window of opportunity to escape. Freedom from violence should not be a luxury and nobody should have to remain in danger because they cannot afford to leave, just as no victim should lose faith in

the justice system because their cries for help are dismissed or delayed. Will the Taoiseach commit to establishing a safe fund to help victims of domestic abuse? What will he do to ensure abusers are not accommodated within the ranks of An Garda Síochána and to see that complaints of abuse are taken seriously by Fiosrú?

The Taoiseach: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta as an gceist phráinneach seo a ardú. Aontaím léi go bhfuil an méid foréigean i gcoinne ban sa tír seo uafásach. I thank the Deputy for raising this extremely important issue.

What we witnessed yesterday in terms of the revelations in the court case involving Paul Moody was quite shocking and horrendous and the level of abuse evident in that case made for extremely difficult hearing and reading. Equally shocking are the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre's reports on the use of its national helpline. It was contacted 24,000 times, a 5.5% increase on the previous year, and its annual report outlines unprecedented levels of demand.

As the Deputy, in fairness, acknowledged, over the past three or four years, there has been a sea-change in how the Government has approached this issue in terms of the establishment of Cuan, for which funding now is approximately €80 million, sustaining support for front-line services and accelerating delivery of safe accommodation, with a commitment to provide 280 safe spaces by the end of 2026. Legislatively, the Minister is continuing to introduce various legislation, for example, Jennie's law for a domestic violence register; Valerie's law for the removal of guardianship rights of those convicted of killing partners; and laws to restrict the disclosure of counselling notes in sexual assault court cases. The Minister is pushing the outer limits of legislation to give protection to women and to deal with this. That is real, tangible progress across funding, legislation, prevention and victim support, but we will continue to strengthen those supports for victims and survivors.

The domestic violence travel supplement will, I understand, be introduced by the Minister for Social Protection this month, providing free travel when referred by a Cuan-registered agency.

I will ask both Ministers to work with the Deputy in terms of any additional funding or ring-fencing funding for any specific purposes. We are open to any constructive proposals on that.

We have modernised the legal framework to better protect victims. The engagement of the Family Courts Act 2024, the Criminal Justice Act 2020-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach. He will come back in. I call Deputy Bacik.

The Taoiseach: These have all been significant, and then there is the implementation of the O'Malley report-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The time is up.

The Taoiseach: -----on the journey of the victims.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I thank the Taoiseach for his response and his commitment to strengthening supports further. The reality is the institutions of the State, in too many ways,

are still not supporting victims of abuse. I will give two examples. First, hours were spent at the justice committee yesterday debating laws on the disclosure of counselling notes in rape trials when we all know that simply should not happen. Deputy Kelly has been working with the Minister and putting amendments on that, and indeed working with the Rape Crisis Ireland on it. Second, perpetrators of domestic violence in far too many cases are using the courts by way of abusing victims further.

Last week, I attended the launch of the Right to Transparency campaign at which we heard harrowing testimonies from women and their families who have been through the family court system. One grandfather described how his daughter had fled an abusive relationship barefoot in her pyjamas with a broken jaw. Her abuser received a sentence, but a suspended one, in the criminal courts. His daughter was imprisoned because her traumatised child had refused overnight access visits. That is just one example.

The *in camera* rule is an important facet of family law proceedings but we need to acknowledge reform of family court procedures is needed-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy and call the Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: -----to support victims and survivors. We are very happy to work with the Government on this.

The Taoiseach: That reform is under way and is continuing. We have been fairly open to any constructive amendments in respect of the various legislative mechanisms that have been introduced. The Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026 will restrict the disclosure of counselling records in sexual offence trials and criminalise the exploitative practice of sex in lieu of rent. The criminal justice Bill of this year will set up a domestic violence register of judgments, which will ensure that convictions for serious domestic violence offences are made public as part of the conviction process. Each Garda division now has a protective services unit focused on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Early intervention is key.

There is a broader issue of education and awareness and there are some good programmes, with the GAA and Ruhama, for example, in respect of aspects of this. Operation Encompass, which is a police-led, school-based early intervention approach designed to support children and young people who experience domestic abuse, is in development for Drogheda, County Louth.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach and call Deputy Cairns.

The Taoiseach: On all fronts-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The time is up.

The Taoiseach: -----we are going to proceed with this agenda.

Deputy Holly Cairns: Today we got news that we all knew was coming. The Government's new rent rules have already driven rents to a record high. They are rising at the highest rate in a quarter of a century. Year on year, rents are up 7% in Dublin, 13% in Cork and a whopping 18% in Galway. We told the Taoiseach this would happen and these measures would undermine renters and he said it was "a ridiculous assertion". Now it is renters who are paying the price.

Lauren Keena worked hard, sat her leaving certificate in 2025 and got her dream course in Galway. Because she knew she could not afford to live in the city, she put her life on hold for a year and worked full time to save up. I spoke to Lauren yesterday after seeing a video she posted online in tears at the heart-breaking struggle to find a place to live in Galway. She has tried everything - hundreds of emails, viewing after viewing, applying on *rent.ie*, *daft.ie* and through agencies, private student accommodation, digs and every avenue possible, but has found nothing. After nearly a year on a waiting list for private student accommodation, she was finally offered a studio, but the condition was €12,000 upfront for nine months, with no monthly instalments allowed. How is anyone supposed to afford that, let alone somebody fresh out of secondary school?

Lauren said something else which stuck with me. She said she feels embarrassed. No young person should feel embarrassed to be in this situation. The Government should be embarrassed for failing them. Right now, this feels like a country with no vision for young people, no place for them and no future they can afford. What are they supposed to do? Are they supposed to work harder and save more? They are already doing that but it is not working because the housing system is fundamentally broken.

We have all been knocking on doors in Galway, so I am sure the Taoiseach has seen the same thing I have. Everywhere you look, there are lock-boxes hanging from houses turned into short-term lets, houses that could be homes for students, workers or young families. Instead they are Airbnbs going for extortionate rates while young people like Lauren are left crying into their phones, wondering what they are supposed to do. At what point is the Taoiseach going to admit that Ireland is becoming a country that young people simply cannot afford to live in? Will he now admit that his rent rules have been a disaster?

The Taoiseach: First of all, again, rents have been too high for far too long. Any economist will say there is only one way to deal with this and it is supply. We need more supply and we need it more rapidly. The Government is taking decisions that will ensure over time we get more supply. It is going to take time and that was said at the time.

Deputy Rory Hearne: When?

The Taoiseach: With respect, I did not interrupt.

An Ceann Comhairle: Do not interrupt again, Deputy Hearne.

The Taoiseach: I have not interrupted anybody here.

I am going to make this point, and it is a fair point. I have looked at the Deputy's proposals. There is nothing in her proposals that would increase supply over the next three years anything

over and above what the Government is doing. In fact, it would be less. I have looked at her State construction company idea. It would be three or four years down the line before anything would come out of that. We already have a Land Development Agency, which has 14,000 in the pipeline. It is time people got real here. It is all very well doing the sloganeering. We all know the crisis out there in housing. The Government is taking decisions in respect of it that have substance behind them. We need to get to 50,000 per annum. I have seen nothing from anywhere across the House outlining how people propose to get there in terms of alternative proposals to what the Government is proposing. We have activated the local authorities, approved housing bodies, the Land Development Agency and, yes, the private sector. The Deputy is totally opposed to the private sector having any role in housing. That is her party's position.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: That is totally untrue.

An Ceann Comhairle: Are you not happy with your leader posing the question?

Deputy Rory Hearne: False.

The Taoiseach: That is the Deputy's party's position.

You have said it a lot of times, Deputy Hearne. You have been saying it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Excuse me. The rules are the rules. This is Leaders' Questions. If you are not happy with the leader you have asking the question, maybe you would consider changing that but respect the answer to the question that has been asked.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: We are not happy with that leader.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: You cannot say mistruths.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will continue now.

The Taoiseach: The RTB data shows we have about 246,000 tenancies, the highest on record. In terms of *daft.ie* data, it indicates asking prices but it is not comprehensive. The RTB does a more comprehensive dataset in terms of the entirety of the market. One has to take these figures with some degree of care, as the author himself acknowledges that the report has to be examined with care. That has to be said. The bottom line here is we want rents to moderate. We want to get them down.

Deputy Rory Hearne: When?

The Taoiseach: The bottom line is what was happening over the past four to five years prior to the change was not sustainable. The Deputy knows that. The Housing Commission said it was not sustainable. The ESRI said it was not sustainable. Everybody accepted it was not sustainable.

Deputy Rory Hearne: How is €3,500 a month sustainable?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, I am not going to ask again.

The Taoiseach: Therefore certainty had to be given to the market, and also additional protections. In terms of existing tenancies, they have not been impacted in any shape or form by this to the same extent. Again-----

Deputy Rory Hearne: Ask the I-RES REIT tenants.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, I am not going to tell you again.

The Taoiseach: No, they have not been impacted and the Deputy knows that too but that will not get said. We are talking in terms of the newer tenancies here. We need more supply.

Deputy Rory Hearne: They have been evicted in record numbers.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Hearne, you are free to leave if you cannot comply with the rules.

The Taoiseach: Sin an rud is tábhachtaí. Caithfimid i bhfad níos mó tithe a chur ar fáil chomh tapaigh agus is féidir linn agus sin atá faoi chaibidil ag an Rialtas.

Deputy Holly Cairns: The confidence with which the Taoiseach tries to slate the Social Democrats' policies on housing is honestly astounding, when we consider that he is coming in here on a day when there is news that rents have gone up more than they ever have since records began. That is in the context of a housing crisis that has turned into a housing disaster and then into a catastrophe, where there are record levels of homelessness, where rent prices, house prices and homelessness are all going in one direction under this Government. Then the Taoiseach stands up in here and says our plans would do damage. The Taoiseach's response and his rhetoric on housing are now ringing about as hollow as his election promises. Time after time, piece of legislation after piece of legislation, the same thing happens. The Opposition warns him. We tell him this will bring up rent prices. He does this big how dare my doubt my bona fides thing, and then rents go up. Then he comes in here and spouts out these lines about how the Opposition's plans will not work. It is not credible. This Government has no credibility left on housing.

The Taoiseach: I do not think the Social Democrats' proposals are credible. They are so sparse. They are so lacking in detail. They are not fleshed out. I genuinely do not think the Social Democrats' policies on housing are credible. They talk about a savings and investment scheme.

Deputy Rory Hearne: It has worked in France for a hundred years.

The Taoiseach: It would take years to implement. They know that.

Deputy Rory Hearne: If the Government had started a year and a half ago-----

The Taoiseach: The issue here is not funding. The State has put up €9 billion.

Deputy Holly Cairns: How long has the Government been standing over housing policy? It will be a decade of the housing needs review.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy knows. Let us talk about the savings and investment scheme that they put forward. How would that bring rents down next year? How would it bring rents down the year after? It would not add one additional supply of housing-----

Deputy Rory Hearne: Of course it would.

The Taoiseach: ----until about four or five years' time, even if they got the additional funding. That is the point I am making. Their housing construction company is so poorly fleshed out--

Deputy Holly Cairns: Why did the Government not do it four or five years ago? Better late than never. It is not too late.

The Taoiseach: I do not mind having a debate about housing. Let us debate it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, if you do not listen to the answer-----

Deputy Rory Hearne: The Government made decisions for the institutional investor funds.

The Taoiseach: No, we absolutely did not. We did not.

Deputy Rory Hearne: Yes, it has. That is why it increased the rents. It absolutely is.

An Ceann Comhairle: Taoiseach, excuse me. This is not a back and forth. I suggest Deputy Hearne go away and learn the rules of the House. The Standing Order for Leaders' Questions is a back and forth between the leaders. Do you have a difficulty with that? At any stage, if you cannot comply with the rules or the Chair's direction, you are free to leave, as is any Member. We have a lot of business to do today and I intend to get on with it. Do you wish to finish, Taoiseach?

The Taoiseach: Just to make the point about research from the RTB. If you compare like with like and apples with apples in respect of the other data reviews that have taken place, it is a far different story in terms of the impact on existing tenancies in particular.

An Ceann Comhairle: Time is up, thank you. Deputy Tóibín is next.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The average rent of a two-bedroom flat is now €2,176 a month. That is the highest on record. It is equal to €26,000 a year. Incredibly, a PAYE worker has to earn €32,000 just to be able to pay for that rent currently. The average rent in Dublin city is now heading towards €3,000 a month. That is eye-watering. It is incredible that now Dublin is the highest in the whole of the EU for one- and two-bedroom apartments. Rent in Dublin is now for the rich. The number of evictions increased by 50% in the first three months last year. The Government's policies have led to 7,062 evictions in just one quarter. It is incredible. The equivalent to the population of a full Irish town was evicted just in the first quarter of this year. It has enormous human consequences.

Ciaran and Jessie Redmond are from County Wicklow. They worked all their lives. Their daughter has now got leukaemia. Ciaran has had to leave his job to look after his daughter and help in her treatment. Jessie works and the family income is just above the threshold for supports. They are now facing eviction and going into emergency accommodation because of the Government's policies.

I have listened to the Taoiseach. His Government has been in power in one form or another for the past ten years. In that time, rents have increased by 80%. Rents have increased in 13 of the past 14 years. Each year, we hear him declare that we have turned a corner and each year those rents keep coming up. It is not by accident. We in Aontú warned that his policies would actively push up rents but he knew this. This was actually meant to happen.

The Taoiseach admitted it in his answer to the Social Democrats that this is actually a market activation tool. The Taoiseach believes that if rents go up, viability will increase, more builders will come into the market and house supply will increase. The Government could have achieved that viability without hitting hard-pressed renters. It could have cut VAT on house building. It could have cut connection fees on house building. VAT and connection fees work up about €50,000 in each housing unit. That would have reduced the price on families and increased viability, bringing more builders into the market and increasing supply.

Viability is not the only problem in this. Planning and infrastructure are so dysfunctional that even if we get more builders in, it is not going to make a difference. Uisce Éireann said to us in the committee that it will take until 2050 before all the gaps in the water infrastructure, which are blocking the building of homes, will be filled.

Planning, permitting, licensing, procurement, tendering and judicial reviews, all the tools the Government has in the sector, are all glacial in this country. Will the Government reverse this rent policy? Will it reform the dysfunction in planning and infrastructure? Will it ease the tax pressure on the building of new homes?

The Taoiseach: The budget has eased the tax pressure in terms of apartments-----

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Just apartments.

An Ceann Comhairle: Do not dare.

The Taoiseach: -----through the reduction of VAT to 9%. That was a significant measure, which was attacked by large elements of the Opposition at the time. We put huge equity into EirGrid and we have put substantial equity into Irish Water, all designed to accelerate infrastructural development. We did that at the very beginning of the Government through the national development plan and through budget allocations. The investment in water is significant.

We have also put significant investment into the Land Development Agency, which has up to €10 billion in available capital for the construction and development of housing. We use every lever and mechanism we can use to get more supply, and it is about more supply. We brought in a rental tax credit to try to ease the pressure on renters because rents are too high and we acknowledge that. The only way to deal with it is to get more houses built and to get more apartments built. We have worked on all aspects of this, from the Critical Infrastructure Bill going through the House now, through the housing activation office, which has been allocated €1 billion to deal with housing enabling infrastructure on the ground to remove barriers and delays to housing, and through the reform of the rental market which simply had to happen and was advised by all concerned. Anybody who examined the market in detail, from the ESRI to the Housing Commission, all said this could not be sustained the way we had it and that we had to change it and create certainty for the long term. It will take time for some of that to yield. The State has already put €9 billion into housing this year alone, which is huge. If we want to get to 50,000 or 60,000 units per annum we need an investment of about €20 billion. This is the challenge facing the country.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Planning and procurement.

The Taoiseach: We have resourced An Coimisiún Pleanála quite substantially and the feedback now is that far more timely decisions are being taken by An Coimisiún Pleanála in respect of planning permissions. There is a much more positive feel about the changes we brought about some years ago to An Coimisiún Pleanála. The Planning and Development Act is having an impact. Reform to judicial review will also have an impact. This is a multifaceted approach to housing. We are focusing on it and prioritising it. We are not interested in slogans or cheap politics. We are interested in a proper analysis of the housing market and what it will take to get a volume of supply into the future. Yes, infrastructure is a key part of this and water infrastructure in particular. We will continue to work with Irish Water in respect of wastewater treatment plants in smaller developments. There has been some progress on this in terms of nature-based solutions throughout the country, which have approval and which will enable smaller projects in towns and villages to get off the ground.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: There is another aspect to this debate that is completely missing from the Chamber and that is the issue of demand. Leaving certificate economics will tell us demand is also a large aspect of this crisis. The population of the country has increased by 382,000 in the past five years. This is the same as the population of Galway, Mayo and Leitrim. These counties have seven hospitals, three universities, 400 schools and 170,000 homes. The Government is simply not building this level of infrastructure at the moment. One of the most basic rules of economics is that if demand increases without increasing supply, rents and house prices will rise and availability will reduce. There is a lot of talk in the Chamber about

sustainability. It is unsustainable to allow demand for housing to exceed supply every year and that is what is happening. Will the Government reduce tax on homes and increase connections? Will it reform the planning system? Will it invest properly in infrastructure? Will it decrease the number of people coming to Ireland during this crisis?

The Taoiseach: There is no doubt that population growth is a factor. It went up 8.5% between 2020 and 2025. If we go back to 1995, the population has increased by 52%. There are positives in this because we had been declining up to the 1960s and 1970s as a population down to 3 million. I am not clear on what the Deputy is suggesting. It is not easy to unwind that. There is no question a significant proportion of it is migration into the country. If we look at our health sector and the analysis by CSO recently in terms of employment growth-----

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: It is a minority of people coming in the health sector.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, do not.

The Taoiseach: I am interested in the Deputy's debate. I am trying to have a sensible debate about it and not one that gets me attacked because we are having the debate. Please allow me to respond. The bottom line is our health and care sectors are significantly dependent on migration. Look at the financial sector and the technology sector.

An Ceann Comhairle: The time is up now Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: We cannot unwind an economy simply by saying no one else is allowed in.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Taoiseach. That concludes Leaders' Questions.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Taoiseach admits it is a factor.

The Taoiseach: Of course it is a factor. There is no question it is a factor.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Then it has to be dealt with

An Ceann Comhairle: That concludes Leaders' Questions and the Taoiseach's time is up as well.

I have two welcomes with regard to the Gallery. Deputy Richard O'Donoghue would like to welcome a ladies group from Bulgaden, County Limerick who are in the Gallery. We also have group called It Takes A Village from Greystones, which has campaigned on social media protections for children, and includes children from St. Patrick's national school. They are all very welcome and I hope they are enjoying the robustness of politics.

Ceisteanna ó na Comhaltaí Eile - Other Members' Questions

Deputy Emer Currie: I warmly welcome the latest Garda recruitment campaign. It is encouraging that we are on track to surpass 15,000 gardaí by the end of this year. As the State recruits more gardaí, I want to raise how and where the State trains gardaí. The town of Templemore has served the State well, hosting the Garda College that has trained men and women who have proudly served the people of this country as our gardaí. I hope the Garda College in Templemore has a long future as the primary Garda training college. I wish to ask the question: why only Templemore? The demands of modern policing are more complex than ever while, at the same time, Ireland's population is growing rapidly and becoming more diverse. The nature of society, crime, urbanisation and the communities we live in have all changed utterly. The policing needs of the country have transformed just as our country has transformed.

The time has come for a second training college, one that should be based in Dublin and that leverages the potential for greater linkages with the State's recently expanded network of technological universities. There is a compelling case for that second training college to be located in Blanchardstown. Blanchardstown represents one of the fastest growing population centres in the State, of which I am proud. It has diverse and dynamic communities, one of the country's largest retail centres, a university, the national sports campus and an expanding technological and economic corridor. We also have a campus of TU Dublin, an ideal site with ideal synergy. It would offer major recruitment advantages across Leinster and align Garda education with the future needs of policing, digital capability and emerging technology rooted in community engagement and modern urban policing skills.

As I have raised with the Taoiseach previously many times in the Chamber, Blanchardstown and west Dublin face significant policing pressures. The K district is one of the busiest policing districts in the country. Blanchardstown is comparable in size and scale to a regional city but there is just one Garda station serving more than 100,000 people, compared to three stations in Limerick city. Since 2012, over 8,300 homes have been built in Dublin 15. Entirely new communities have been developed but no new Garda station has opened. Locating a new Garda college in Blanchardstown would send a signal that the policing challenges in Dublin and, in particular, in the growing communities around the M50 belt, are being taken seriously. If we are serious about delivering the Garda numbers our communities need by 2030, we must be equally serious about where, when and how we train them. Dublin 15 is ready to play that role.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond now, Deputy, please.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. We should say the first priority of the Government and the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, is to get more gardaí on our streets. This is manifesting itself, particularly in our larger cities.

There has been positive feedback to the numbers coming out of Templemore and there has been greater visibility, particularly last winter, but we need to spread that out across the country. By the end of this year, we should have the highest number of sworn gardaí in the history of the State. We made commitments to continue to support and expand the capacity of the Garda training college in Templemore as part of the programme for Government. We have also committed to considering the establishment of a second Garda training college. We also said we would consider allowing Garda trainees to undergo parts of their training course in regional

or technological universities, using existing resources and capacities, particularly in specialist modules in certain areas.

A Garda training review group was established to identify delivery options to increase the scale and capacity of high-quality education and training and continuing professional development in An Garda Síochána. That will report to the Minister by the summer. Clearly, given the month of May, summer has not arrived yet. The group will consider specifically the case for a second training college and the role the tertiary system could play in the delivery of Garda training. It does not all have to be in Dublin. I will make that point. I know the Deputy has a fondness for Blanchardstown and she referenced TUD. I was responsible for getting that campus built in Blanchardstown in double-quick time with the late Brian Lenihan. There was a particular story behind it. I was also in a later life as the Minister for Health involved in expanding the role of the hospital in Blanchardstown. I am already hearing around the country advocacy for any potential additionality to the Garda training centres and we have to be fair to everybody. The overall point, however, is that Templemore will always be the core training college. There are no Tipperary Deputies in the audience, but it is just to keep things straight on that front. It has given great service, and the town and people of Templemore have given great support through the years to the Garda training college. However, additionality may be required, even though we are breaking record numbers at the moment. There is a high volume going through Templemore and there are 200 more going in. The overall workforce has gone from 15,980 to approximately 18,500 in the past ten years. Covid interrupted what happened in the college. We are committed to recruiting about 5,000 gardaí over the lifetime of the Government and so far it is going positively.

Deputy Emer Currie: I was careful to state that Templemore should be retained as the primary Garda college but a second located in Dublin would be regionally advantageous for recruitment. It would broaden appeal. Progress is being made in capacity. The Minister has spoken about increasing capacity at Templemore to 250. We need more investment in roads policing, community policing and community safety strategies. Where better to do that than among the fast growing and most diverse population in the country? It is not just about numbers; it is about the types of policing challenges we now face like digital capability and cybercrime. Where better to train than in a modern and dynamic university? TUD Blanchardstown has the space, sports and exercise facilities and land zoned for educational purposes. The infrastructure exists for a pilot programme. We are a microcosm of modern urban Ireland, and we would be a great location for a second training college.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for her advocacy for Blanchardstown and TU Dublin. I have identified a group that has been established. I think former Secretary General Jim Breslin chairs that group with senior officials representing the Department of justice, An Garda Síochána, the Department of further and higher education, the Office of Public Works and the Higher Education Authority. It first met in January and is continuing its work with a schedule of meetings, including engagement with CEPOL, the European Union police service training agency on international best practice. It will report by the summer. Overall funding to An Garda Síochána has increased by €500 million over the past five years. Total funding now is approximately €2.74 billion. Recruitment is gathering momentum. Just under 800 new recruits entered Templemore in 2025. Groups of over 200 trainees are regularly entering Templemore, which is positive news. Some 201 entered on 4 May, which is good news.

Ceisteanna ar Pholasaí nó ar Reachtaíocht - Questions on Policy or Legislation

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: The budget last October left disabled people €1,400 per annum worse off in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. For months, disabled people and their advocates have painstakingly and painfully told their stories. They tell us the choices they make daily. They are forced to choose between heating, eating and charging their vital mobility devices. Their appeals to the Government to deliver a cost-of-disability payment immediately have fallen on deaf ears. The Government says it needs to figure out what a cost-of-disability payment should be. The previous Government did a report five years ago. The Government's own report tells it exactly what is needed. Disabled people cannot wait. They need a permanent payment, and they need that now. Telling them repeatedly to wait is unfair. It is cruel. Will the Taoiseach listen to the voices of disabled people? Will he hear their call and give them that payment now?

The Taoiseach: In the most recent budget, we gave the largest ever single year increase in disability services. It went up 20%, which was €628 million. That is what happened with disability services in that budget. In addition to that, there have been significant increases to core payments and domiciliary care increases,. One-off payments for all were removed because they could not continue forever. We cannot do €3 billion in one-off payments on a continuing basis.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I asked about a permanent payment.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is rhetorical, Deputy. It is not a back and forth.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: He misunderstood, deliberately so I suspect.

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not care. It is not a back and forth.

The Taoiseach: Work is ongoing on the cost-of-disability payment. There was a good summit recently. We have to engage with the sector before it is designed. The Deputy should not pretend it can be done at the stroke of a pen. It cannot, and she knows that well.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: The Taoiseach has had the report for five years.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: The Government says its VAT cut will save the hospitality sector and protect small restaurants and cafes from closure. The reality is that the big winners will be the burger chains. McDonald's alone will make €20 million as a result. The irony is that in my constituency, it is apparently a Government decision bringing about the closure of a successful independent cafe, which is the wonderful Silk Road Cafe in the Chester Beatty Library at Dublin Castle. On Monday, I met the cafe proprietor, Ibrahim Phelan. He and his staff are very distressed. They only learned some weeks ago that the Chester Beatty Library and the cafe will have to close from 15 June until the end of the year in the context of Ireland's EU Presidency. I have submitted a parliamentary question to the Minister of State with

responsibility for the OPW, Deputy Moran, to clarify why this drastic closure is necessary. However, I am asking the Taoiseach and his Government colleagues why the decision was only communicated so late in the day with little notice to the 14 staff due to lose their jobs on 15 June. I am also engaging with the Chester Beatty. There is a real concern that this is drastic action only communicated late in the day. There is then the closure of a wonderful cafe that has been in operation there for over two decades and is such a great amenity in the constituency.

The Taoiseach: I heard about that last week, and I am making inquiries on that and organising a series of meetings.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I thank the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: I am not clear as to why the cafe has to close for six months, to be frank. I will pursue that with security and so on. I will do that.

On the hospitality sector more generally, thousands of people work in the hospitality sector. A lot of young people and students work in the sector and so on. It is a cynical Opposition play to talk about McDonald's. They are all owned by franchisees. The Deputy knows that.

Deputy Martin Heydon: And the very cafes she would advocate for.

The Taoiseach: Why does she keep on talking about the big boys? It is individual franchisees in any of these chains. She knows that. The bottom line is we have to sustain employment in domestic services sectors as well.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Hearne, do your best. It is your time now.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I take note of the Ceann Comhairle's earlier comment, and I thank her. I am back to the rents. Who can afford these outrageous rents? Does the Taoiseach know how much of a nurse's take-home pay is needed to pay the average Dublin rent of €2,600 per month? It is every last cent of it. This is the most cruel and callous Government since the foundation of this State. The Government parties knew their new rental measures would cause even higher rents and evictions, but they did it anyway. We have the highest rate of evictions since the Famine. Has the Taoiseach no sense of shame about the human misery being caused right now across this country by the Government's policies?

I o'clock

I met a woman in Cabra yesterday who broke down in tears. She has cancer. She is being evicted. She has a colostomy bag. She cannot go into emergency accommodation. Where is she to go? Fianna Fáil has abandoned ordinary people. Why is the Government not putting in place a ban on evictions and freezing the rents?

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you. The Taoiseach to respond.

The Taoiseach: Fianna Fáil has not abandoned ordinary people. The highest number of social houses built on record was built last year - 9,000 new social houses. That is the way to deal with the housing crisis which has led to the rent increases.

Deputy Rory Hearne: Where are these people to go?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy-----

The Taoiseach: We are about building more homes but you are not. You are just thinking about savings schemes.

Deputy Rory Hearne: That is ridiculous.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy-----

The Taoiseach: You are not.

Deputy Rory Hearne: That is ridiculous.

The Taoiseach: You have a challenge. It is not good enough to come in and attack the Government all the time and come up with nothing yourself.

Deputy Rory Hearne: You are putting words in my mouth.

The Taoiseach: And that has been the subject-----

Deputy Rory Hearne: That is not true.

The Taoiseach: I have looked online and looked at your proposals. They are empty.

Deputy Rory Hearne: That is your view.

The Taoiseach: Empty.

An Ceann Comhairle: This is not a back and forth.

The Taoiseach: That is not my view. Anybody could go and look at it.

Deputy Rory Hearne: It is your view.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Stanley.

The Taoiseach: We will do our housing construction agency when we get around to it. For God's sake, come on.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Stanley.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The report yesterday on rents shocked a lot of people. I predicted, as did others, that this would happen but the scale of it has really shocked me. In County Laois a four-bedroom house has gone up 12.5% year on year, a three-bedroom one by 10% and a two-bedroom house, which is the type most in demand in the county, has gone up by 34%. That is in one year. Notices to quit are up and house prices are up. It is now €530,000 for a bog-standard house in Portlaoise in one estate. I am telling the Taoiseach that the Government cannot leave it totally to the market. We have seen where a *laissez-faire* approach that the market will sort it out has got us in the past. I hope the Taoiseach has not forgotten the crash and the noughties. What happened then was we had a *laissez-faire* approach and it led us into a black hole. The Taoiseach was there for that; he was a Minister then. I am asking him in a fair-minded way-----

An Ceann Comhairle: In two seconds.

Deputy Brian Stanley: -----to please revisit this. There need to be some controls put in to protect tenants.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you. The time is up-----

Deputy Brian Stanley: The fact that it takes a nurse's pay to pay a month's rent-----

An Ceann Comhairle: -----the Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Brian Stanley: -----shows there is something wrong.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, your time is up.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I appeal to the Taoiseach to do something.

The Taoiseach: Rents are too high overall. No-one is arguing about that. There is a lot of pressure on people. Supply is the only way to deal with it. What I would say on the reforms that came in is that the six-year tenancy rule is a very significant enhanced protection for existing tenants. Nothing like it was in place before. We are dealing with new tenancies here in terms of the Daft.ie index, but the vast majority of existing tenancies are not impacted in the same way at all. We need a long-term certain landscape in respect of the rental market. With housing, we are not leaving it to the market. The State is involved in every aspect of housing. Some €9 billion is being invested by the Government - taxpayers' money - to try to get housing going. We are at 36,000 houses and that is not enough. We are going to invest. You also need some degree of private sector money in as well-----

Deputy Brian Stanley: And more affordable housing.

The Taoiseach: -----to get to the €20 billion the Central Bank says is required to deal with the demand that is out there in respect of housing supply.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Taoiseach. I call Deputy Richard O'Donoghue.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: On the scheme the Government brought out for the agri sector for the fuel, some of the sectors are saying that unless you are under an agricultural contractor you do not qualify for this scheme. We have an awful lot of plant hire people who do agricultural work but they do not qualify for the scheme. We have people who might be registered as being a plant hire company but do agri work, and they do not qualify for this scheme. Why is that? If you are doing agricultural work, you should qualify for the scheme. Also, from the point of view of all the construction sector, there should be something for plant hire within the construction side as it helps to bring down the cost.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Martin Heydon): I thank Deputy O'Donoghue. I am delighted to see thousands of farmers and farm contractors applying for our fuel support scheme for them. That has a very clear definition. Under EU state aid rules, we have to define the activity and in this case it is agricultural production. The Government has committed to and is working on separate lines of support for those in the plant industry. Where agricultural contractors are using green diesel or marked gas oil and it is directly linked to the production of agricultural produce, that is covered under this scheme.

Deputy Shane Moynihan: Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur maidir leis na deontais tithíochta athchóirithe. The housing adaptation grants are a game-changer for many people who are older or who have a disability and need to get alterations done to their houses. However, many constituents have raised with me the delays they have in accessing the public occupational therapy lists to get the sort of reports and certifications for the modifications they need. I am asking whether guidelines can be put in place. We know that in many cases the report from the private occupational therapist is reimbursed as part of the overall grant package. However, even that cost can be prohibitive for a lot of older people in particular. Is there any guidance that can be given to local authorities to pay the grant in instalments so that the reimbursement may be made immediately? Perhaps a voucher system could be put in place for a private occupational therapist to make their report. Alternatively, the local authority could be allowed to directly fund or recompense the occupational therapist for the report they might provide.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this. I will talk to the Minister for housing in respect of this. We should be trying to streamline the whole system, which we are doing. People are waiting for OT reports and so on and the idea of paying in instalments pending the receipt of the report is a valid option. We would like to see greater simplification of the requirements overall to speed up the whole application process. I will talk to the Minister about that.

Deputy William Aird: The Taoiseach mentioned earlier all the money that has been spent on Blanchardstown. He might just keep me in mind for the courthouse in Portlaoise.

The programme for Government commits to reducing childcare costs by €200 per month per child. I understand work is planned in phase 2 of the affordability measures. Will the Taoiseach confirm these measures will include the long-term goal of delivering that €200 monthly cost reduction? I acknowledge the €135 million allocated for State-led childcare, the acquisition of buildings this year and the Building Blocks exchange scheme. However, capacity and affordability remains a crisis in my constituency of Laois. A parent who contacted me is paying over €1,500 per month for a single child. Another has been hit with an immediate €200 per child fee increase. For many people, the €200 commitment is a lifeline and I am asking that it be implemented without delay.

The Taoiseach: In the last budget we increased the level of State investment in early learning by about 12%. We cannot do everything in one budget. This is a five-budget Government. Childcare is a key issue; it is in the programme for Government. All three parties in the Government are committed to it. Decisions were taken on the last occasion about disability, for example, which went up dramatically. The income thresholds are increasing from September 2026, which will allow more low- and middle-income families to qualify. We will have the budget in October to see how much further we can progress the commitment in the programme for Government to reduce the costs of childcare to people in line with the objective of the programme for Government.

Deputy William Aird: The Taoiseach will keep me in mind for the courthouse, will he not?

The Taoiseach: I will keep him in mind for the courthouse.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I raise again the status of the long-promised primary care centre for Loughlinstown on the existing health centre site. The HSE confirmed last year that the operational lease process for the new Loughlinstown primary centre, along with full planning, collapsed when the preferred operator withdrew for viability reasons. The HSE advised that it was carrying out a service-led review before deciding on the next steps. However, the process seems to be stalled as there has been no consultation with public representatives. This is an area with one of the oldest populations in Dún Laoghaire. These are precisely the communities that most depend on an accessible, local primary care centre. Will the Taoiseach provide an update and will he ask the HSE to urgently engage with the local representatives?

The Taoiseach: First of all, it is as the Deputy has outlined in terms of the Ballybrack-Loughlinstown primary care centre, which was through the operational lease model. Then the preferred operator encountered difficulties with the economic viability of the proposed project. A service-led review is being conducted. The Department of Health is awaiting an update from HSE primary care in Dublin south on the status of this review. In parallel to this, HSE capital and estates is trying to identify the best location for this primary care centre and the most appropriate of method of delivery for expedience and value for money. The Department is continuing to engage with the HSE on this one in particular and I will come back to the Deputy on it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Apologies, I missed Deputy Mac Lochlainn.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: We have an extraordinary situation at Elm Park, Buncrana in County Donegal where nine families are living in defective concrete block homes which must be demolished, but these homes are also on a dangerous flood-plain. The Minister, Deputy Browne, and the Ministers of State, Deputies Moran and O'Sullivan, were working before Christmas on a scheme to relocate the families. That was announced by the Minister, Deputy Browne, before Christmas.

We are now nearly in June and the families are absolutely traumatised. They are very concerned at responses to parliamentary questions that are very mealy-mouthed. The officials in the Department of housing need to wake up to this humanitarian crisis and present a reasonable scheme in co-operation with the families in those homes. They have waited for far too long. They have waited for years for a solution, so I am appealing to the Taoiseach to speak to the Minister and the Ministers of State and to get this sorted out urgently.

The Taoiseach: To be fair to the Minister, Deputy Browne, I think he has been very responsive to these issues. The fact is that the Minister and the Minister of State, Deputy Moran, and the Minister of State, Deputy O'Sullivan, went to visit and saw the situation at first hand. I will talk to the Minister and the Ministers of State in respect of the progression of such a scheme, if that has been committed to, to see what the up-to-date position is.

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil: I want to highlight a situation facing families in County Kildare following a suspension of the paediatric community assessment tool service in CHO 7. Parents have been told that there are no clinicians available, and ten families have directly contacted me. As a result, children who have already been accepted for an assessment have no clear pathway forward. It is obviously creating worry and uncertainty for families. These parents want to know what interim supports can be put in place, how they will be kept informed, and, more importantly, when we can expect the service to resume.

The Taoiseach: That is very worrying indeed. I will talk to the Minister for Health in respect of this issue in terms of whether interim measures can be introduced to provide a service to the parents and children involved, and then on what the longer term solution will be in terms of recruitment.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: The square in Kenmare town has been flooded many times over the years. To that end, I thank the Minister of State with responsibility for public works, Deputy Moran, for going down there and taking stock. A scheme is promised to deal with the situation. However, a sewerage pipe is crossing the eye of the courthouse bridge which collects debris and trees and practically blocks the river. This is what causes most of the flooding. I am asking if that sewerage pipe could be removed in the interim. To facilitate this happening, a small pumping station would have to be put in to pump the sewage over the bridge rather than it going through the pipe crossing the eye of the bridge. It is a simple project that could be done. I am asking if the Taoiseach will talk to the Minister of State, Deputy Moran, to expedite this matter.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy. I call the Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: It would save people's businesses from being destroyed and ruined as has happened many different times before.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. The Minister of State has been down there, so he is very well aware of the situation. I cannot get into the specifics of the engineering resolution of the problem, but I will talk to the Minister of State and ask him what can be done in the interim.

Deputy Brian Brennan: I wish to speak again about Arklow's Eímear Byrne, who is awaiting life-saving surgery that is not available in Ireland. Only last week, Ms Byrne was made aware that she is not a suitable candidate for the treatment abroad scheme. Her only option, therefore, is to travel, at enormous expense, to the Johns Hopkins clinic in Baltimore, USA. As the treatment abroad scheme does not cover the USA, the people of Arklow and the surrounding area have stood up and set up a fundraising campaign. There has been an absolutely incredible response.

I am aware that we currently do not provide financial assistance for treatments in the USA, but I am asking if we can look at the policy again, as cases such as that of Ms Byrne, who cannot get treatment in Europe, simply cannot be ignored. I spoke directly with Ms Byrne's mother this morning, and, in her words, we are dealing with a life-and-death scenario. We are here as TDs and our main focus is to look after and support our constituents and their communities. If ever there was a case that needed support, it would be that of Eímear Byrne.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this case and I commend the people for rallying behind Eímear Byrne, a young teacher, and her family. I will talk to the Minister for Health in respect of this case. I am aware of the treatment abroad scheme being confined to the European area. There is some talk of engaging with the European reference network on rare multisystemic vascular diseases, ERN, and similar conditions. I am not clear as to whether this treatment can be done in Europe, but, equally, I take the Deputy's point. We have had a good relationship with the Johns Hopkins clinic over the decades in respect of other matters. I will talk to the Minister in respect of this case to see if we can get an opportunity here to be of help and assistance to young Eímear and her family.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: The pensioners of CIÉ have been left waiting 18 years for any increase at all in their pensions. This is causing huge hardship during the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. The increase was agreed between CIÉ and the unions last May, which is one year ago now. When I raised this issue with the Taoiseach in February, he said it would be done imminently. When I raised it with him last week, he said he would talk to the Ministers. Has the Taoiseach talked to the Ministers and when will this long overdue increase for the pensioners who have been waiting 18 years finally be signed off on?

The Taoiseach: I am sorry, Deputy, but the ballot was last year and not 18 years ago. There were a lot of discussions and a lot of negotiations and a proposal came to the Government. I have spoken to both Ministers, and my understanding is that NewERA was examining, as a

final step, the entirety of the scheme and that the board was going to give it consideration. I hope we can get this issue resolved very quickly now. I have, though, been talking to the Ministers about it.

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan: I am not sure if the Taoiseach saw the "Prime Time" special recently in relation to rare diseases and patients' inability to access much-needed drugs. I know the Taoiseach is very familiar with the topic as he previously served as the Minister for Health. I want to bring up this issue again because we have given a commitment in the programme for Government that we will reform the reimbursement process. We really need to start that body of work now.

If the Taoiseach had watched the programme, he would have seen Emily Felix and other people with Friedreich's ataxia. Craig Coady from Cork, whose child suffers from the same condition, has lost a child already and his wife is seriously ill. On that programme, Professor Michael Barry indicated that the reason pharmaceutical companies do not want to come here to reimburse drugs is because they do not make enough money. That might be true in some cases, but it belies the fact that the majority of them do not come here because it is too much hassle to go through a health technology assessment. The review I am asking for would at least review that process and, hopefully, streamline it so we can get more effective and efficient decisions in future.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy. I call the Taoiseach.

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan: We have a budget process that we are all heading into at the moment, and we need funding for rare diseases and new drugs to be included as part of this budget.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call the Taoiseach to respond. I thank the Deputy. The time is up.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. He has been a strong advocate for reform of the reimbursement scheme, particularly insofar as it applies to what we might term orphan drugs. There is a growing issue here in terms of how some of these drugs are coming onto the market, the level of engagement between some companies and the State and, yes, our own system as well. Some companies are more accessible in terms of engaging with than others, but that is of no value to those who need the medicines quickly. I am aware of the cases the Deputy mentioned and the urgency attached to them. I have spoken to the Minister for Health about this issue. There is engagement with the company involved in the case of Friedreich's ataxia. The Department had been awaiting responses, but that engagement is vital to trying to get this resolved for Friedreich's ataxia cases.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach. I call Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh.

The Taoiseach: I accept the need for a review.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: Mikey Henry Benson, who has scoliosis, as the Taoiseach will know, recently turned 18. I visited his home on Saturday, where he is in the loving care of

his mum, Penny, his dad, Michael, and his sisters. He is a bright and happy young man despite the torture he has been through. Mikey Henry has been utterly failed by Children's Health Ireland, CHI, while his spinal curvature has regressed to 130°, crushing his vital organs. His parents will never give up. They continue to fight for his life.

With the help of the Mater Private Hospital, they have now found a pathway to get the necessary surgery to save Mikey. I ask the Taoiseach to do three things: to appoint a designated person in the Department of Health to help Mikey's parents to work through the logistics of getting Mikey to the appropriate hospital and the expert surgeons who are willing to operate; to allocate the necessary funding to save Mikey's life; and to approve the use of the Air Corps for transportation. We have a chance to save Mikey and other young people neglected by CHI and failed by this Government.

The Taoiseach: Again, I do not have the specifics of that. The Deputy said it is going to the Mater Private. Can she send me a note on the case so that I can see the different stages? It seems unusual and I do not know what the relationship with Temple Street is, with the system there or with CHI more generally.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I will do that.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: Yesterday the Government announced new rules and legislation regarding puppy farming. This is very welcome because for far too long, this and previous Governments have ignored animal welfare issues. However, there is a glaring omission in the legislation and that is the mention of a cap. Is it still the case that puppy farms will be able to have 300 female dogs breeding on site and potentially thousands of pups? If it is, then that is a huge flaw in the legislation. Last December the Social Democrats brought forward a Bill that had a cap included. The Taoiseach has been talking about cheap politics here today and he is constantly talking about how the Opposition does not offer positive solutions. In December we brought forward a Bill and Government Ministers, on the floor of this Dáil, asked us not to bring that Bill to a vote because they wanted to work with us on it. I have had no communication regarding the Bill in the last five or six months. That is not good enough.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: It says an awful lot about the Government and about the Ministers in Government that-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, be fair to other Deputies. You are now way over time.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: -----what was stated here and the promises and commitments made to us that night were not upheld.

Deputy Martin Heydon: Nobody has a monopoly on passion or care for animals, including horses and dogs, or any other elements of animal welfare. As Minister with responsibility for animal welfare, I am determined to drive an agenda of change in a whole host of areas. I was

part of the negotiations on the programme for Government when we transferred the control of dogs back to my Department, which is the right place for it. This is a clear outworking of that. What was agreed yesterday by the Cabinet was the heads of a Bill on dog control and how we approach dog breeding establishments. This is a key element of that. It is something in which Deputy Whitmore has a keen interest. I look forward to working with her and all Members of the House as that Bill progresses through all Stages in the Dáil, the Seanad and at committee, as we put in place dog breeding establishment legislation that will take away some of the bad practices that happened in the past. That is something that I know Deputy Whitmore wants to do, as do I and my colleagues in government. I look forward to working with the Deputy and all Members of the House on that.

Deputy Claire Kerrane: Everyone in this House should be extremely concerned at the ongoing situation within the National Ambulance Service. Paramedics save lives. We need them and we need more of them. I was very proud to stand with paramedics and others on the front line on strike in Loughglynn in Roscommon town last week. During that first strike action there was a lot of commentary on deals that had been on the table previously that were rejected. Of course, what was not said was the fact that those deals gave with one hand but took away with the other in terms of allowances. The main finding of the 2020 independent report was that salary scales needed to be updated to match the major upskilling we have seen over the last two decades. Paramedics have waited six years since that report. We need to see that finding delivered. That recommendation needs to be implemented. Only the Department of public expenditure can implement it. While I respect the ongoing talks and it is important they conclude, as they go on and as strike action is due again next week, we need the Department and the Minister to acknowledge that the recommendation will be implemented. I believe that can do this.

The Taoiseach: First, I welcome the fact that talks are in progress right now through the labour relations machinery. I do not want to prejudice the outcome of those talks or say anything that might harm them. Dialogue is key to resolving this. We have modernised the service very significantly over the years. Everybody has been involved in that, including workers and all concerned. It is important that these discussions can get a resolution to this.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: Yesterday I visited the proposed site of the national children's science centre at Earlsfort Terrace. I walked through the derelict north wing of that building with members of the board. It is a space that is full of potential but today it lies idle in the heart of our capital city. The Taoiseach stood on the site in December 2022 and announced, to be fair, the great redevelopment of the National Concert Hall. The fear now is that unless both projects proceed in parallel, the new concert hall will face closure for a prolonged period when, and if, construction eventually begins on the national children's science centre. We know now, following arbitration last December, that the OPW is legally obliged to deliver this project by the end of 2029, with annual work commitments already falling behind schedule. Will the Government unequivocally commit to delivering the national children's science centre? Which Department will lead the delivery of this? Will ring-fenced funding finally be put in place for this vital national project?

The Taoiseach: Is the Deputy referring to when I was at the site of the National Concert Hall?

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: Yes, on the same site.

The Taoiseach: That was for the concert hall.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: Yes, absolutely.

The Taoiseach: Why is the Deputy saying it will not go ahead?

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: I am not saying-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Perhaps further engagement is required. It is not a back and forth---
--

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: The National Concert Hall might have to close if construction was to begin again on the science centre.

The Taoiseach: That is a separate matter completely.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: It is on the same site.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy knows there are huge issues with that. Come on.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: That is not-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Further engagement, as I said. Thank you.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 1.25 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 2.25 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 1.25 p.m. and resumed at 2.25 p.m.

National Treasury Management Agency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026: Second Stage

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Robert Troy): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I am pleased to introduce, on behalf of the Tánaiste, Second Stage of the National Treasury Management Agency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026. The legislation marks an important step in bringing the National Asset Management Agency, NAMA, and the special liquidation of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, IBRC, to a close. It provides for the transfer and consolidation of the remaining activities of both NAMA and the special liquidation of the IBRC within the National Treasury Management Agency, NTMA, thereby ensuring

continuity and legal certainty for all parties and enabling the orderly wind-down and dissolution of both entities.

To give effect to this, the Bill provides for the dissolution of NAMA on an appointed dissolution day. On that day, any remaining NAMA activities will transfer to the NTMA. The Bill also provides for the transfer of residual matters from the IBRC in special liquidation to the NTMA. This will take place by way of a ministerial direction and a transfer agreement to be entered into by the special liquidators of the IBRC and the NTMA. Once that transfer has taken place, the special liquidators will finalise the liquidation of the IBRC in line with their obligations under company law, including the dissolution of remaining IBRC subsidiaries and the resolution of any outstanding administrative and tax matters. In order to ensure the NTMA can manage this combined residual activity effectively, the Bill also confers on the NTMA the necessary functions and powers to undertake that work.

Taken together, these measures mark an important milestone in bringing to a conclusion two interventions that were central to stabilising the financial system and protecting the wider economy following the global financial crisis. Since then, both NAMA and the IBRC special liquidators have worked through complex portfolios and litigation. The Bill reflects that the very substantial work of both is now largely complete. While recognising the challenges of the period that led to these interventions, it is also important to acknowledge the substantial and diligent work carried out by NAMA and the special liquidators in the interests of the State. Therefore, before turning to the detail of the legislation, I will outline the extensive work undertaken over many years by both NAMA and the IBRC special liquidators.

NAMA was established in 2009 as part of the State's response to the financial crisis. It acquired loans with a par value of €74 billion for a consideration of €31.8 billion, including €5.6 billion of State aid to the five participating financial institutions. The value of the residual portfolio to transfer to the NTMA is projected to be less than €25 million. That demonstrates the progress of NAMA in resolving its acquired portfolio.

Over its lifetime, NAMA has delivered significant outcomes for the State. They include the redemption of €30.2 billion in senior debt in 2017, three years ahead of schedule, thereby eliminating a major contingent liability for the State; the full repayment of its €1.6 billion in subordinated debt by 2020, leaving the agency fully debt free; a lifetime contribution of €5.6 billion to the Exchequer, comprising €4.7 billion in cash, more than €450 million in corporation tax and the transfer of assets valued at €425 million to the Land Development Agency, LDA, for retention in State ownership; facilitating the delivery of more than 44,500 homes, including approximately 3,000 social homes; the regeneration of the Dublin Docklands strategic development zone, SDZ, supporting the delivery of over 4.2 million sq. ft of commercial space and more than 2,000 homes; and the transfer to the LDA of the National Asset Residential Property Service, NARPS, portfolio of social homes, as well as two large development sites, which the LDA believes can deliver more than 7,000 homes.

Throughout its life, NAMA has operated within a strong statutory, governance and accountability framework. From a peak of 369 staff, it is now expected that just eight staff members will be required within the NTMA to manage the remaining residual activity to completion. NAMA is widely recognised internationally as one of the most successful State-backed asset management agencies established in response to the global financial crisis. It played a key role in restoring confidence in the Irish economy.

The Irish Bank Resolution Corporation was placed into special liquidation on 7 February 2013. At inception, the special liquidators were tasked with realising a loan portfolio valued at €21 billion, comprising more than 15,000 borrower groups and collateral spread across 22 jurisdictions. The scale and complexity of this liquidation were unprecedented in the State's history. Since then, the special liquidators have disposed of all assets; resolved the overwhelming majority of borrower relationships, asset disposals and cross-border legal issues; paid all unsecured creditors in full, including interest, in respect of amounts owed at the date of liquidation; returned approximately €1.7 billion to the State in respect of its claims and related holdings; delivered €470 million in distributions to the Exchequer, with further distributions expected prior to its final dissolution; and progressed the liquidation to its final stage, with only residual litigation and associated loan matters remaining.

As with any liquidation of this scale, it is normal and expected that certain matters, particularly litigation, continue for some time beyond the active disposal phase. The NTMA is now ready to assume responsibility for this final phase. The agency has engaged closely with NAMA, the special liquidators and the Department of Finance as it prepares for the transfer of responsibilities. I acknowledge the contribution of NAMA, the NTMA and the special liquidators of IBRC in reaching this point. In particular, I recognise the leadership team in NAMA and the special liquidators. I also thank the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, the Data Protection Commission, the European Commission and officials across government for the detailed work undertaken throughout the drafting process.

I will now move to the text of the Bill. As already set out, this Bill has three objectives, namely, to dissolve the National Asset Management Agency and transfer all of its remaining assets, liabilities, rights, obligations, records and causes of action to the NTMA; to enable the transfer of residual matters of the IBRC special liquidation to the NTMA, or a subsidiary of it, by way of a ministerial direction and transfer agreement; and to confer upon the NTMA the functions necessary to manage these combined residual matters to completion. The Bill also repeals the NAMA Act 2009, amends the NTMA Act 2014 and the IBRC Act 2013, and makes consequential amendments across multiple enactments and statutory instruments.

The Bill is divided into four Parts with 54 sections in total, and includes three Schedules. Part 1, preliminary and general, is comprised of sections 1 to 5, inclusive. These sections provide for standard legislative matters, including the Short Title, commencement provisions, interpretation, expenses, repeals and revocations.

Part 2 is comprised of sections 6 to 16, inclusive, and provides for the dissolution of NAMA and the transfer of residual matters to the NTMA. Section 6 defines key terms for the purposes of this Part. Section 7 provides that the Minister for Finance will appoint a day to be the dissolution day of NAMA. Section 8 provides that NAMA shall stand dissolved on the dissolution day. Sections 9 to 12, inclusive, provide that all lands, property, rights and liabilities of NAMA shall be vested in the NTMA, the continuation of contracts and that all records held by NAMA are transferred to the NTMA. Section 13 provides that any claim arising from NAMA's performance of its functions prior to the dissolution day will lie against the NTMA and that the NTMA is substituted for NAMA in any legal proceedings. Section 14 provides that anything commenced and not completed by NAMA can be carried on by the NTMA. Section 15 provides for the preservation of any indemnity previously granted under section 34

of the NAMA Act 2009. Section 16 provides for the final accounts and final annual report of NAMA to be completed by the NTMA.

Part 3 covers sections 17 to 20, inclusive, of the Bill. It amends the IBRC Act 2013 by inserting new sections 11A to 11D into that Act. Taken together, these sections provide for the Minister to direct the special liquidators and the NTMA to enter into a transfer agreement to transfer residual matters from the IBRC special liquidation to the NTMA. They also provide for the substitution of the NTMA in any proceedings transferred from the IBRC special liquidation to the NTMA. Where proceedings outside of the State are transferred, the transfer takes effect from the date that the relevant legal requirements in the jurisdiction concerned have been satisfied. These provisions also ensure the continuity of contracts relating to the residual matters transferred.

Following the transfer of residual matters, the special liquidators will finalise the winding up of any remaining IBRC subsidiaries, complete any remaining administrative matters and take the steps required to complete the winding up of the IBRC and have it dissolved under company law.

Turning now to Part 4, this Part amends the NTMA Act 2014 and provides the National Treasury Management Agency with the powers and functions it will need to manage the limited residual matters that will transfer from NAMA and the IBRC special liquidation. It does so by inserting a new Part 6A into the NTMA Act 2014. This Part is divided into 12 Chapters covering sections 49C to 49AD, inclusive, and I will briefly take the House through the purpose of these provisions.

Chapter 1 relates to the functions of the NTMA in relation to the residual matters transferred from NAMA and from the IBRC special liquidation. This includes key definitions which were relied upon in the NAMA Act 2009 and are to be preserved, such as associated debtor, bank asset, credit facility and participating institution.

Section 49C sets out the NTMA's functions in relation to managing the residual activity transferred. These functions mirror NAMA's former functions and powers only to the extent necessary to complete remaining tasks. This includes that the NTMA shall take all steps necessary to protect, enhance or realise the value of the bank assets transferred. This section also provides that the NTMA may have the powers necessary for the performance of its functions under this Part of the NTMA Act. This means that the additional functions and powers provided to the NTMA to manage residual activity apply only to the management of the activity transferred from NAMA and the IBRC special liquidation and cannot be used by the NTMA for the performance of the functions of the agency more broadly. The remaining provisions in Part 4 also address a number of key matters necessary to support the effective management of these residual activities.

Section 49D provides that the NTMA may return surplus funds to the Central Fund or transfer assets to the Minister. Section 49E clarifies that the Minister, directors, the chief executive, staff and agents of the NTMA will not be considered shadow or de facto directors of any participating institution, debtor, associated debtor or guarantor when performing functions under this Part.

In relation to participating institutions, sections 49F to 49I, inclusive, provide that the NTMA may require the provision of books, records and information relating to transferred bank assets, including recourse to the High Court where necessary.

These provisions also ensure that the NTMA assumes the rights and obligations of participating institutions in relation to those assets, subject to certain limitations, and is not liable for any wrongs committed prior to their acquisition by NAMA.

Sections 49J to 49M, inclusive, provide for the preservation of existing rights and obligations attaching to bank assets, ensuring that contractual terms remain unchanged following transfer, while facilitating practical measures such as exempting the registration requirements in respect of security and certification of ownership of assets.

Sections 49N to 49P, inclusive, confer the necessary powers on the NTMA to manage and dispose of relevant assets, including the ability to offset amounts owed against debts arising in connection with NAMA bank assets.

Section 49Q provides that no cause of action arises solely by reason of the transfer of these residual matters to the NTMA.

Sections 49R to 49T, inclusive, deal with legal proceedings, including the continuation of proceedings involving transferred assets, the provision of assistance by participating institutions and provisions to support the enforcement of debts.

Sections 49U to 49Y, inclusive, provide for the appropriate use and disclosure of information necessary for the management of these assets, ensuring that such disclosures do not breach confidentiality obligations and remain subject to data protection law.

Finally, sections 49Z to 49AD, inclusive, include a number of important supporting provisions, including those relating to payments to relevant persons; clarification that the NTMA is not deemed to be carrying on regulated banking business; powers of access to Land Registry documentation; interpretative provisions in respect of the Companies Act 2014; and offence provisions in respect of the provision of false or misleading information.

The Bill also comprises three Schedules. Schedule 1 provides for a list of instruments to be repealed and revoked, as required, to update the Irish Statute Book following the dissolution of NAMA and amendment of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Act 2013. Schedule 2 provides for a list of instruments to be amended to remove redundant provisions and to update instruments where required. Schedule 3 provides for the amendment of statutory instruments.

NAMA and the IBRC special liquidator have now substantially completed their mandates and are reaching the final stages of their life cycle. In that context, it is appropriate that any remaining matters, particularly litigation, are managed within a streamlined structure. This Bill provides a practical approach to achieving this, while ensuring continuity and legal certainty for all parties and preserving existing rights and obligations. The NTMA is well placed to take on this role. It has the governance, experience and expertise required to manage complex financial and legal matters to completion while avoiding the cost and duplication of maintaining separate structures that are no longer required given the reduced scale of the remaining activity.

This Bill represents a significant step in the State's post-crisis normalisation. It acknowledges the substantial work carried out by NAMA and the special liquidators of the IBRC and provides a clear and efficient structure to bring the remaining matters to completion. I commend the Bill to the House.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Sinn Féin will not oppose this legislation progressing to the next Stage. We support the orderly winding down of NAMA and the completion of the IBRC process, but we have serious concerns about accountability, governance and the extraordinary salaries that will be paid, which are utterly out of kilter with public sector norms. Sinn Féin will bring forward amendments on Committee Stage to address those concerns.

Before we close the book on NAMA as a State, a people and a Government, serious questions have to be answered. Under the Government's plans, the CEO of NAMA, Brendan McDonagh, appears set to transfer into the NTMA on the same terms and conditions he currently enjoys. We are talking about a salary of approximately €430,000 per year. That places him among the top 0.1% of earners in the State. It is more than €100,000 higher than the salary of the Governor of the Central Bank. Last year, the Government even attempted to appoint this same individual as a so-called housing tsar, effectively sidelining the Minister for housing, before backing down under sustained pressure from this side of the House. Therefore, the public is entitled to ask whether there are any lengths to which the Government will not go to protect Mr. McDonagh's extraordinary salary package. The Government continues to bend over backwards to protect the NAMA CEO's salary of €430,000 per year. Last year-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I hate to interrupt, but the Deputy cannot bring something like that up with regard to a Civil Service salary.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: This is an extraordinary salary that is part and parcel of the winding up of a State agency.

An Ceann Comhairle: That may be, but the Deputy has to have consideration for the fact that the individual in question is not here to defend himself. I ask the Deputy to be cautious.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: I will continue with that noted.

Last year, the so-called housing tsar plan collapsed under pressure and now the Government wants to fold an individual back into the NTMA while preserving the same extraordinary pay package. Contrast that for a moment with the National Ambulance Service workers who have been forced onto picket lines simply to secure modest improvements in pay and conditions and address chronic recruitment and retention problems. Front-line workers are told there is no flexibility, no urgency and no money, but when it comes to protecting a senior executive associated with NAMA, or any senior executive, suddenly the State can move mountains and seems very motivated to do so.

We also need to be honest about what NAMA represents and the political choices that followed the collapse. The Government will try to present this Bill as the final chapter in a successful rescue story, but the story of NAMA is inseparable from one of the darkest economic periods in the history of the State. Following the crash in 2008, the State undertook

extraordinary measures to stabilise the banking system. Banks were recapitalised at massive public expense. Blanket guarantees were introduced and NAMA was established to acquire toxic property loans from the banks. The stated purpose of NAMA was to protect the interests of the State and manage distressed assets in a way that maximised public value, but when we examine the legacy of NAMA honestly, serious questions remain. NAMA paid €31.8 billion to acquire loans with a face value of more than €74 billion. The banks incurred losses of more than €42 billion on those loans, losses that were ultimately borne by ordinary people through austerity, including cuts to services, higher taxes, emigration and lost opportunity. The Comptroller and Auditor General estimated in 2022 that the net cost of the bank stabilisation measures amounted to €45.7 billion.

Nowhere is the failure of the post-crash political and economic model clearer than in housing. While NAMA was established to manage distressed property assets, what followed was the large-scale transfer of Irish property into the hands of international vulture funds and institutional landlords. Entire developments of apartment blocks and offices and land banks were sold off at rock bottom prices. These were assets that could have been strategically retained for long-term public housing, instead of becoming investment vehicles for global finance. The legacy of NAMA and austerity and the economic ideology of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are still visible across every community in the State. Following the crash, Irish property and land banks were sold at rock bottom prices to vulture funds and institutional investors while ordinary people carried the burden. Today we are living with the consequences, including record numbers of evictions, the highest homelessness figures in the history of the State, eye-watering rents, families trapped in insecure accommodation, workers commuting impossible distances and an entire generation effectively locked out of home ownership. Coincidentally, the same generation in many cases bore the brunt of the economic crisis and the decisions taken by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in its aftermath.

When we examine the financial returns achieved by NAMA, the picture becomes even harder to justify. NAMA was handed billions in property assets at the absolute bottom of the market following the crash. Property values subsequently recovered dramatically, yet NAMA's projected surplus to the State amounts to approximately €5.2 billion, including corporation tax paid. Against the backdrop of a bailout that cost the State tens of billions, those returns are remarkably modest. The reality is that many assets were sold too cheaply and too quickly. Rather than retaining strategic assets for public development or managing them over the longer term for the benefit of the State, vast quantities were transferred into private hands. Similar mistakes have been repeated elsewhere. AIB shares were sold at prices that deprived the State of billions in potential value. Now we see the same approach with Permanent TSB. Time and again, the State socialises losses and privatises gains.

The Bill closes an institutional chapter, but it does not close the political and economic questions arising from that period.

The central lesson of the crash is that the Government made political choices about who would bear the cost of economic failure. The people who paid the price for the banking collapse were not the speculators, banks or international investors. Ordinary workers paid the price. Communities paid the price. Young people paid the price through emigration, unemployment, unaffordable housing and lost opportunities. Nearly 20 years later, many are still paying through huge rents, underfunded public services and deep inequality. As we debate the winding

up of NAMA, we should not allow anyone to sanitise or rewrite what happened during that period or minimise the hardship imposed on so many people across the State.

For our part, Sinn Féin will engage constructively on the Bill. We support the orderly winding down of NAMA and the completion of the IBRC process, but we will continue to demand accountability for the failure of the banking collapse and the deeply damaging and flawed political choices that followed it.

An Ceann Comhairle: I want to be clear. I am not interrupting speeches. It is just that when there is an allegation made against someone who is not a Member of the House but a private citizen, we must be cautious and understand that they are not here to defend themselves.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I welcome the Bill to facilitate the orderly wind-up of NAMA and the IBRC, an end of sorts, in part, to the contemptible chapter of history, which saw Irish taxpayers bail out the banks in a process that was quite poor in terms of the return for the Irish people. In many cases, these assets were captured by vulture funds at rock bottom prices. The full truth of Project Eagle and other projects may never be known. Given that NAMA was handed a portfolio of property assets at the bottom of the market and against a backdrop of having seen complete market recovery and a deepening housing crisis, it sticks in the back of people's throats. It is difficult to understand and hard to dismiss how a cynical person might view the outworkings of NAMA.

As I have said, this is an end of sorts but only in part. The conclusion of the work of NAMA and the IBRC is not the end for the taxpayer or many Irish generations to come. The Government may try to portray this as a success, but the fact of the matter is that this was a core component of the Government's overall bank bailout, a bailout for which the Comptroller and Auditor General put the net cost at €45.7 billion. NAMA achieved a meagre €5.2 billion return on €32 billion in assets when the market was at its very bottom. The same principle holds for the State sale of AIB and PTSB shares, which were sold on the cheap and cost the State billions. The Government is not just failing in terms of public services; its management of State assets is woeful.

In terms of the practicalities of the wind-up, one that was recently considered by the Committee of Public Accounts, of which I am a part, relates to the former CEO of NAMA who returns to the NTMA on the same terms and conditions he is currently on. We were told last week in a committee meeting that he will return with a salary of €430,000. That does not seem right. There is no vacancy for a CEO, as far as I am concerned, in the NTMA. Perhaps the Minister of State could fill in the blanks. Why is a job in the NTMA being offered to the former CEO of NAMA? We would like clarity on that. NTMA officials are among the most highly paid in the Civil Service. We are told this is necessitated by their expertise and that they receive bonuses when most in the Civil Service or public service do not. We know that only a few years ago the NTMA spent €51,000 on two parties for staff. As I said last week in the Committee of Public Accounts, it is a great place to work. It seems the jobs in NTMA are among the best in the country, with the remuneration of the private sector and all of the benefits of the Civil Service.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: The Bill involves the winding up and dissolution of NAMA and bringing the sad story of the IBRC to an end. Nobody will be particularly unhappy about ending this part of Irish history. Nobody can look back to the circumstances that led to this in a positive manner. It is very difficult to look at NAMA, the bank bailout and the entire sorry story without seeing it as being open business for institutional investors and vulture funds and the people who had to pay were the Irish people.

I remember the onset of the financial crisis when we went from day to day, week to week and month to month. It was a time and place when people made a detailed study of budgets and how every austerity move would have an impact on them, their lives, their family and their wider community. Nobody knew how we would get out of that set of circumstances. Unfortunately, as always happens, the normal, regular people of Ireland did the heavy lifting. In general, those who caused the problem got off scot-free.

What are we talking about? We are talking about a bank bailout and all of the stabilisation measures, which resulted in a net cost of €45.7 billion. Over €5.2 billion was the return on the assets sold by NAMA. Let us be clear. Everything was sold quickly and in a dirty manner. Those outside forces with the money and resources were welcomed in by Governments and able to make an absolute killing. The unfortunate thing was that the people of Ireland had to pay the price and continue to do so.

There have been impacts, and not only on individuals, such as those on certain disability payments or whatever else that were cut. Anybody involved in the community sector knows it was hollowed out. Funding for mental health addiction and drug addiction services have never returned to where it was before 2008. That is the reality.

The Government wants to say this was a well executed operation, that it is all over and there is nothing to see here, but the fact is that the people were absolutely screwed and the impact is still being felt. That is why we try to keep the pressure on. It is all well and good talking about services of €9 billion and all of the rest, but people out there feel they are being absolutely hammered. The resources of the State, which could be used to provide some element of mitigation, are not coming through.

Land, assets and infrastructure were sold off at a pittance. Action was taken by government that reinforced, through austerity, the circumstances that created a detrimental economic impact across the board. We had no building of houses or plan by government.

3 o'clock

We went from a situation where the market would sort everything, where all was going well and where we had the Celtic tiger situation, when the Government had moved away from building houses, to a situation where all the moneys dried up. The only people who were facilitated were the vulture funds. We have ended up in a scenario where we have the most dysfunctional housing market in the world. We saw the Daft report and what we expected to happen in relation to the Government's removal of whatever protections were provided. What have we ended up with now? We have ended up with rents that are absolutely through the roof and where people cannot afford to buy or to rent houses. If people are on a social housing list, they are waiting for years.

This is the circumstance we have been dealing with in real terms from that period of 2008. The Government's attempts to solve this problem was literally to sell off the family goods at rock bottom prices. As I said, we facilitated a huge number of people in making a huge amount of money and, to a greater degree, we facilitated the Irish people in taking all the pain. We are not in a better circumstance now. Government members will talk about the wonders of FDI, and that is not taking into account the present issues and global instability. They will talk about how they maintain the economy but the fact is the economy is not working for a large number of people. We can talk about surpluses and full employment but we have a huge number of people who may be employed in a job that previously would have given them and their families security and it does not at this point. It does not give them any element of security.

The Minister of State knows better than others the huge impact it had on politics. It was a breach of trust, particularly for the Minister of State's party, with a huge section of the Irish people. Unfortunately, that has had an impact across the board, in that at times people do not see any solution that politics can provide. At times, because people cannot see a solution, they look in places they never would have considered before. We need to ensure we can offer them something much better and some element of hope of a better life - a life where they can afford the rent and a world where they can buy a house and work one job and not have to work three or four jobs. People used to give out about in the American system. The American dream does not work for most American people. We have almost created an Irish nightmare that is very similar.

In terms of the bank bailout, NAMA, IBRC, the history of Anglo Irish Bank and all of it, we are still paying for it now. I will reiterate what my colleagues said. It is good enough that a position, with a salary of €430,000, can literally be found for the chief executive officer of NAMA in the NTMA. I and many others would need some element of explanation for that. I do not think any of this is good enough.

The only thing I am happy about is that we are bringing this to an end. We are bringing what was a huge crime carried out against the Irish people to an end but we cannot forget the fact there was a huge-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy. You are over time. You know you were sharing.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: There was a huge cost. Just let-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy. Deputy Nash is next.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: Okay.

Deputy Ged Nash: I thank the Ceann Comhairle. At least I am keeping it in the county. It is a seamless transition.

I am pleased to speak on this Bill. While the Bill's provisions are mostly technical and procedural in nature, the import of NAMA and the IBRC, the history attached to these institutions, and their purpose, certainly were not and are not. Seventeen years on from its controversial establishment, NAMA is today being given a decent burial. Thirteen years on

from the effect of tearing up the IBRC promissory notes, this zombie bank is being liquidated. On balance, this is a milestone; this is a good thing.

It is important today that we reflect on why these institutions were set up in the first place and on how they were managed. We also need to reflect on the lessons that need to be learned to ensure the citizens of this country are never again saddled with the debts and long-term consequences of the actions of a class of developers who flew too close to the sun egged on by a political elite of enablers, out of control bankers who funded the developers' misadventures and, indeed, the actions of unquestioning regulators who got far too close to them all.

Irresponsible frenzies of tax cutting coupled with over-spending, allied with an over-reliance on one or two unreliable tax heads to fund the madness that commenced at the start of the 2000s led directly to the economic collapse and an impact on our society and political system that is still spinning out. We still cannot say with any certainty that the outworkings of that catastrophe have in any way concluded.

There are lessons here for the way in which our economy is managed today and into the future. While I do not want to exaggerate, there are worrying signs that all the lessons of the disaster that kicked off in earnest only 18 to 19 years ago have not been fully understood. The shadow of the crash still looms; most notably in a dysfunctional housing and construction sector that still has not fully recovered. We see the impact of this every single day. There are more than 17,000 people homeless in what is now, objectively, a rich country. Annual housing targets are routinely unmet. Housing is out of the reach of far too many working class people. There is the smashing of the social contract that urgently needs to be pieced back together.

NAMA, in terms of the legislation governing its work and the priorities laid down by successive Governments, has one would argue done a good job on what it was asked and required to do. On its own terms, that is what it would say. It has handed more than €5.6 billion in terms of a lifetime contribution to the State. I recall only too well when NAMA was set up in 2009 the fear the taxpayer would ultimately have to keep bailing out the agency, an agency that it is worth recalling took over, as the Minister of State stated, €74 billion of distressed assets at less than half that initial valuation. That was a genuine fear. That was an insight into the fairly legitimate sense of catastrophe and fatalism that abounded at the time as the country crept towards the bailout signed up to in 2010.

I will not go into the details here but we were all critical at the time of the risk of fire sales of assets that, in effect, belonged to the taxpayer. I remember a lot of the NAMA exposure originally was in the UK and that market recovered more quickly than property values and the market in Ireland. It was there that NAMA did much of its early substantial transactions and later as the property market improved in Ireland, as property values rose, more of NAMA's work was focused here in the domestic market.

At the pre-legislative scrutiny of this Bill, NAMA defended itself and pointed to independent assessments of its work, and I accept that. To a degree, one's position on whether or not greater value might have been achieved by selling portfolios and properties later than they were sold is a subjective position. I absolutely understand that. Positions tend to be taken on these kinds of matters with the benefit of hindsight. I do acknowledge the independent assessments that have taken place of the performance of NAMA.

Would the Minister of State take it on board the following in the context of the Committee and Report Stages of the Bill? One of the recommendations made by the committee in the context of our assessment at pre-legislative scrutiny stage was that a further independent assessment of the performance of NAMA would take place, with the benefit of hindsight and as the dust is settling on that era, if I can use that term.

That is something the Minister might consider whether by way of inserting a provision into the primary legislation or, indeed, by the way of regulation requiring NAMA, or the NTMA as it will be responsible for NAMA. That is something that should be considered.

It is good to see, and the Minister put it on the record, that there are residuals of around €25 million only that would be transferred from NAMA to the NTMA. That is a good thing. Regarding the IBRC, while the story of that tumultuous time is yet to be written and fully comprehended, we should remember the significance of the bank bailout and the path it led us on as a country. The IBRC was the zombie bank that was managing the remnants of Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society - institutions that will go down in infamy in this country and, indeed, internationally. It was just 13 years ago when the promissory notes were torn up and significant steps were made to get the proverbial monkey off the backs of the Irish people and their economy. That in itself was a not insignificant landmark on our road to recovery.

Turning to the Bill and the recommendations made by the committee in terms of pre-legislative scrutiny, I made the point about that independent assessment of NAMA. That would be very important from the point of view of accountability and transparency and that is something that should be considered. The committee also recommends that Minister for Finance seek quarterly reports from the liquidators of the residual assets following the dissolution of NAMA that would detail the outstanding liabilities and expected timeframes for recovery and that the committee would be provided with same. Again, I am not necessarily persuaded that this needs to be placed in primary legislation but if the Minister by way of regulation or through other means would make a commitment that this would happen, that would attract the support of committee members and all members of the Opposition. It is also worth noting that the committee did recommend that the NTMA should publish a note in its final accounts to detail NAMA's specific liabilities once NAMA is dissolved. That will enable us to keep track of progress in that regard and ensure that those liabilities simply do not get consumed into the overall NTMA analysis and annual reports.

The point was also made as well that the specialist expertise that has been built up and that will transfer to the NTMA should not to be lost. Considerable expertise has been built up in that agency over many years and it is the kind of commercial and housing expertise that is required for the State to meet its own albeit modest objectives in terms of housing development and the raising of finance to support housing development. Some other recommendations were made as well that I will not go into but the Minister of State will be familiar with them. I would ask the Minister of State and his officials to scrutinise the committee's report on pre-legislative scrutiny and consider some, if not all, of those recommendations for Committee and Report Stages.

My last point harks back to the banking situation at the time NAMA was established when the country was in the throes of recession and when all hope appeared to be lost. A significant decision was taken in this House that taxpayers would essentially bail out the main financial

institutions. We, in the Labour Party, decided that it was best that we did not support that decision but others did. That we did not is immaterial; it was passed that evening and we made the case as to why that initiative should not have been taken and the implications of that. It brought us closer to the bailout and the loss of our economic sovereignty in late 2010, the outworkings of which have yet to conclude.

One of the implications of that was the bailing out of Permanent TSB. The State still owns a majority stake in Permanent TSB. An offer was made by BAWAG P.S.K. recently to purchase the State's remaining share in Permanent TSB. The Minister of State will argue that this is another milestone but it appears to me that the only policy this Government, its previous iteration and the one before that had with regard to banking policy was to rid themselves of what they see as a burden, namely, majority State ownership in banks that the taxpayers of this country bailed out. Our position in the Labour Party is clear. For many years, we were of the view and made the case that PTSB could remain in majority State ownership and that State ownership should be used to try to expand that bank, create a third banking force in this country, break that Bank of Ireland-AIB duopoly and try to introduce more significant competition for householders and small businesses in a market that where competition is very badly needed.

It is quite extraordinary given the decision taken almost 20 years ago now to bail out the banks that there has not been a debate in this House on the future of PTSB. That is quite extraordinary. The Government might laud itself and say that this is an expression of the normalisation of the economy now, if I can describe it as such, and the fact that we no longer have any concerns about how our banking system is functioning. However, that is hardly the point given the significant decision made a number of years ago. We requested it at Business Committee meetings over the last period of time. It is quite extraordinary we have not had an informed debate on what we are doing in PTSB, why we are doing it, the nature of the offer, potential implications for banking staff employed in PTSB and implications for account holders and crucially the branch network because from what I can read, there are no guarantees from the prospective new owner and majority owner of PTSB. I have lots of different questions about the Government's decision, why the decision was taken and when PTSB was made aware by the Department of Finance that prior to BAWAG coming forward, another interested party appeared to express an interest in making a pitch to buy the State's share. Lots of different questions have not been ventilated at all in this House. It is quite extraordinary given the burden carried by the taxpayer over many years, the implications of the bank bailout, the burden carried by the taxpayer over many years and the implications of the bank bailout for the Irish taxpayer, our economy and our society more generally. I ask the Minister of State to reflect on that and that he and the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance, Deputy Harris, agree to a debate on the implications of the future of PTSB in this House without any further delay.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Second Stage debate on the National Treasury Management Agency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026. This is, in effect, the Bill that closes the book on NAMA. It dissolves the agency, concludes the special liquidation of IBRC and transfers the small amount of residual activity to a new resolution unit within the NTMA. It is a technical Bill but it deserves a serious debate because behind it sits one of the most consequential interventions in the history of the State.

NAMA was established in 2009 in the worst economic circumstances the State faced since the 1980s. It acquired 11,500 loans from five Irish banks. The par value of that loan book was

€74 billion. The acquisition value was €31.8 billion. It involved over 800 debtor connections and 60,000 properties spread across multiple jurisdictions. Those are not ordinary numbers. They are the numbers of Ireland's exposure to the international financial crisis and the result deserves to be noted. NAMA fully repaid the €32 billion in debt it issued to acquire those loans. It was self-financing throughout its lifetime. It has returned a lifetime surplus of €5.6 billion to the Exchequer. Not one cent of taxpayers' money was lost in the operation of the agency itself.

Professor John FitzGerald in his independent review last year described that surplus as appropriate and reasonable. He concluded that NAMA was "broadly successful". International studies place it among the best examples of a State-backed asset management vehicle anywhere in the world.

That is the legacy of the former Minister, Brian Lenihan. It worked in the end and it did more than balance the books. Of course, it did not get everything right. NAMA facilitated the delivery of over 44,500 new homes, though. It delivered nearly 3,000 social housing units directly. It transferred the National Asset Residential Property Service, NARPS, social housing portfolio and two major development sites with capacity for around 4,000 additional homes to the Land Development Agency last year, keeping those State assets in public ownership, which is important. In my constituency of Dún Laoghaire, NAMA-secured sites at Cherrywood and elsewhere played a real part in the housing that has been delivered in recent years.

The regeneration of the Dublin docklands for example, a strategic development zone that was a wasteland a decade ago and is now one of the most successful urban quarters in Europe, would not have happened without NAMA. However, we should not allow the orderly end of the agency to become a story that flatters us into forgetting how we got here in the first place. NAMA existed because this country experienced a catastrophic failure of banking, regulation and political oversight in the years before 2008. Hundreds of thousands of jobs were lost. A generation emigrated and the €5.6 billion surplus is a fraction of what the wider banking collapse cost the public.

NAMA succeeded in the task it was given but the task should never have been necessary. The question for this House, as we close out NAMA, is whether the lessons have been learned. I want to flag three. First, light-touch regulation does not work. The Central Bank has powers and independence today that it did not have in 2007. That must be protected, not eroded, and this should be remembered the next time the industry argues that rules are too tight. Second, concentration risk in our banking system remains real. The exit of Ulster Bank and KBC reduces competition further. I have highlighted this point in the House many times previously. I also note what Deputy Nash has just said in terms of PTSB and the recent developments there. The Department of Finance and the Central Bank must keep a careful eye on this particular aspect. Third, when the State takes on a complex tasks, clear statutory objectives matter. Professor FitzGerald again was very clear on this. The clarity of NAMA's statutory mandate and the way it was implemented made a major contribution to minimising the cost of the crisis. That is a lesson worth carrying into every State body we establish from hereon in.

On the Bill itself, the provisions are sensible. The full repeal of the NAMA Act 2009, and the insertion of a new Part 6A into the National Treasury Management Agency Act 2014, gives NAMA a clean, consolidated statutory framework to bring the residual matters to completion. The scale is small. NAMA officials told the joint committee on finance last month that the

resolution unit will begin with assets of less than €30 million, manage roughly eight outstanding litigation cases, and operate with eight staff for an estimated two years. That is the right scale for the job.

NAMA is ending the way it should: quietly, in profit and on time. That is unusual for any State intervention and it deserves to be acknowledged. I want to express my thanks to the majority of the hard-working staff and management that delivered this result for Ireland. We need to ensure the lessons learned are remembered and that a NAMA-type bad bank is never required or needed again.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: This Bill provides us with an opportunity to reflect on what NAMA was, why it existed, what it could have been, and what lessons we should learn. The word "NAMA" immediately brings to mind one of the darkest periods in recent Irish history and reminds us that when the rich and greedy gamble at the casino, it is ordinary people who pick up the bill. It also reminds us of an era when brutal austerity was inflicted on people by Fine Gael as a direct result of the actions of dodgy bankers and cowboy developers.

We should also not forget that NAMA represented a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape our housing system for the benefit of ordinary people; an opportunity that was shamefully wasted. Cailleadh an deis seo. Bunchloch dhínit an duine is ea an tithíocht.

When the Anglo Tapes came out in 2013, the public got a glimpse behind the curtain of those at the top. Anglo Irish Bank executives were in stitches laughing as they discussed their collapsing bank. They joked about running rings around an incompetent regulator and straddling the Irish public with generational debt. John Bowe, Anglo's head of capital markets, spoke about never paying back the taxpayer and in his words, "pulling made up figures out of his arse". It was all fun and games for those at the top but it was no laughing matter for ordinary people. Jobs were lost, homes were repossessed and emigration returned. Hundreds of people lost their lives to suicide as a result of the economic downturn. The consequence of the recession for these families who lost loved ones could not have been more severe.

Houses and apartments should be looked at as homes and not as assets. Treating housing as an investment opportunity is what got us into the mess of the most recent recession. NAMA was the Government's plan to tidy up the mess to sell off thousands of homes and land-banks for knock-down prices to the highest bidder, taking lands and homes off the bankers and handing them over to vulture funds. It was a Fine Gael solution to a Fianna Fáil problem.

The civil servants in NAMA achieved what was set out in their statutory remit. I commend their hard work and competence in a time of immense pressure. The problem is the politicians in charge of coming up with what this remit was and their lack of any foresight or imagination. NAMA will have delivered over €5 billion back to the Exchequer by the time it is wound up. Ireland is not currently suffering from a lack of money. There is nearly €39 billion in cash sitting under the management of the NTMA. What we are suffering from is a chronic lack of affordable housing. There are a record 17,517 people living in homeless emergency accommodation. Shamefully, 5,571 of them are children. The median price for a house in Dublin is now €500,000. The average rent for a two-bed apartment in Ireland is over €2,000 a month. Home ownership is becoming a pipe dream for most workers on normal wages. People are struggling just to keep a roof over their head.

NAMA took on 60,000 individual assets. Included in this were huge land-banks capable of delivering thousands of affordable homes. While the economic crisis subsided the housing crisis accelerated. In the midst of this housing crisis, NAMA continued its fire sale of desperately needed land and homes. It could, and should, have changed tack but the Government sat on its hands. Homes should have been turned into social and affordable housing. Land should have been developed as housing that people can afford. A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shift housing away from speculators was not taken. Speculation was doubled down on and the vulture funds made billions of euro.

In 2014, the vulture funds began to make their move. Project Sand saw a pool of residential loans worth €1.1 billion bought by Lone Star and Oaktree Capital. The Project Stone loan portfolio, worth €6.85 billion, was acquired by CarVal, Lone Star and Deutsche Bank. Project Eagle sold €5.6 billion-worth of commercial loans to Cerberus. The vulture funds were here to stay, buying up loans, buying up homes and pumping up prices. Cerberus alone has seen the value of its assets in Ireland increase by €1.63 billion. Tens of thousands of homes are owned by these funds. People who have had their mortgage sold from underneath them know what a nightmare this can be with exorbitant interest rates, faceless companies and endless debt that they often cannot get out of. There are real people suffering very real consequences because of these political decisions. I recently met a renter in Galway city being evicted from her home of 20 years by one of these vulture funds.

Can you imagine being evicted from your home of 20 years by some faceless vulture fund?

The former Fine Gael finance Minister, Michael Noonan, defended these vulture funds in 2016 when, talking about the funds that effectively were brought in and welcomed into Ireland in this context, he said that "vultures provide a very good service in the ecology through cleaning up dead animals that are littered across the landscape". This sums up the entire NAMA episode. Ordinary hard-working people were treated like fools by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and like cash cows by developers, bankers and vultures.

As what is left of NAMA is folded into the National Treasury Management Agency, we should also look at the operating practices of the NTMA. Section 40 of the National Treasury Management Agency (Amendment) Act 2014 provides that the National Treasury Management Agency "shall determine, monitor and keep under review an investment strategy for the assets" of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, ISIF. ISIF still has investments in companies operating in the illegally occupied Palestinian territories. This is part of the investment strategy decided by the NTMA. It flies in the face of our obligations under international law and the Genocide Convention. The illegal occupation in Palestine is intensifying. A few weeks ago, Aws al-Naasan, a 14-year-old boy, was murdered while he stood at the gate of his secondary school in the West Bank. He was shot in the head by an Israeli settler. This was part of a wave of settler violence in the Occupied West Bank primarily targeted at schools and children.

An Ceann Comhairle: Unless I have missed something, what is the relevance?

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: This is relevant. This is absolutely relevant. The Bill is transferring NAMA into the NTMA. I am questioning the record of the NTMA in terms of how it is managing public funds through ISIF. The NTMA is using public money-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Is it related to the Bill?

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: Yes, it is absolutely related to the Bill. I raised it at pre-legislative scrutiny. I am putting in an amendment on Committee Stage of the Bill. The NTMA is managing ISIF funds. It has some of our public money in companies that are operating illegally in the occupied territories in the West Bank. I am referring here in the Dáil to some of the repercussions of that. A 14-year-old boy was killed at the school gates by Israeli settlers and yet our public money, managed by the NTMA with Government approval, is being used to fund companies operating illegally in contravention of international law in the West Bank. It is absolutely relevant to this Bill and the NTMA. I raised it previously in pre-legislative scrutiny. I am giving the Minister of State notice that I will be raising it on Committee Stage and tabling an amendment on this. It is absolutely unacceptable that Ireland is still investing in companies that are taking part in this illegal occupation, and doing that through the NTMA. This Bill is about transferring NAMA into the NTMA. The Irish taxpayers do not want their money invested in companies profiting from stolen Palestinian land. The NTMA must take immediate action to fully divest from all these companies without delay.

It appears that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil seem hell-bent on repeating the mistakes of the past. The handouts for property developers are back, the tax cuts for vulture funds are not going anywhere and property prices have gone far beyond their Celtic tiger peak. Lessons must be learned from NAMA. The market will not come to the rescue of the housing crisis. The State must take a leading role in affordable home building. Finally, apartments and houses should never be treated as speculative assets; they are homes.

Before I conclude, I want to talk about the pre-legislative scrutiny report that was done by the committee. It is relevant. Why was pre-legislative scrutiny brought in to the Oireachtas? It was brought in post the crash. It was one of the learnings from the crash to make our legislative process stronger. It is regrettable, in his opening remarks, that the Minister of State did not address the committee's recommendations. It is regrettable that six recommendations in the all-party report were not taken on board. In fact, the analysis done by the library and research service, in its excellent Bills digest, shows that the six recommendations were not properly taken on board and, in fact, four of them were not taken on board at all. Deputy Nash referenced them, but I will refer particularly to recommendations 5 and 6 of the committee. Recommendation 5 is that the Minister for Finance provides a table outlining the value of NAMA-managed properties at time of their sale, compared to their current or most recent valuation. That would provide important information in terms of the learnings from NAMA. The committee and the Oireachtas, but also the public, should be provided with that information. Recommendation 6, which is key, is that a report be commissioned detailing a constructive and critical examination of learnings from NAMA and how to best reflect those learnings in the future operations of the NTMA, the Land Development Agency and any other relevant bodies. These are good recommendations from the all-party committee. I urge the Minister of State to take them on board, either through amendments to the legislation or, as I would welcome, if there are other ways that he can provide that information without requiring amendments to the legislation.

Deputy John McGuinness: During the time when NAMA was dealing with the various property portfolios and issues arising from the work-out of those properties, many questions

were asked, many queries were put before NAMA, and many people who had been in business and who found themselves in difficulty after the crash were treated very badly. That is a fact. That is held up by the number of people who appeared before the finance committee and, indeed, by the work of the Committee of Public Accounts. All of those people are being ignored. I am deeply concerned by the way that they were treated and I raised it continuously during the course of that time. I will give one example. This information is in the public domain. Annette De Vere Hunt was one such person. In the case of another individual, a young child in a family who was ill was approached by those who called to the home. It was unacceptable practice. Nothing has ever come out from that organisation to apologise publicly for what went on. Nor has there been any acknowledgement of the wrongdoing of that agency in terms of how it approached its work. Likewise, at the time when some of the bigger property portfolios, particularly in Northern Ireland, were being discussed, very little help and information were given to the committees of this House to enable them to pursue matters in the interests of the citizens of this country. Particular cases were mentioned.

What concerns me about this legislation is the fact that when the officials of the Department came before the finance committee, they were outlining their approach to the legislation. It was pointed out to them that they would have to come back to the committee to give details on a case the committee was dealing with, which involved the Butler family. Again, it is in the public domain. I am not breaching anyone's confidence here. They raised many questions not only about their treatment as a family but also about the treatment of their investment going right back to the original loan from the bank. It caused the committee to ask all of these questions and to let the committee hear from the Butler family directly, which we did at that time. I was Chairman of the committee. I would say that most of the members who took on board what was being said were absolutely shocked that the circumstances of their case were not examined.

They were also shocked that an agency of the State would not present the facts or deal with the facts that the Butlers were presenting at that time. It was decided that the committee would be briefed from the liquidators' side and that the case would be answered in the context of the facts versus what NAMA or the liquidator had to say. That never happened. In fact, they were to arrange a meeting between some committee members and NAMA relative to how all of this was being exposed publicly, how the facts were being dealt with, if there were facts, and what the case from the other side, which was NAMA, was. That never happened, even though it was promised to an Oireachtas committee representing these Houses. That was before the election. I really thought they would meet with the Butlers and deal with each of the specific accusations or allegations being made, and that each of those allegations would be answered comprehensively. That did not happen.

Now we are at a point where the Bill has gone through pre-legislative scrutiny and the specific cases that were of concern, particularly that family from Tipperary, have not been dealt with. This legislation is simply going to be railroaded through this House. Those who have been individually affected by the decisions of NAMA are not going to have the opportunity to be heard. Those who have been heard through the finance committee are not going to be given the opportunity to have all of their questions answered. If their allegations stand up, and there is lots of paperwork around it, that would bring up further questions on other transactions within NAMA that are questionable. The House has been short-changed here in terms of the legislation being rushed through as have the people who have raised queries not being engaged

with. Certainly the committee members who showed an interest in the Butler case do not know the outcome. The Minister should at least fulfil the promise of the officials and ensure the details of that meeting as given to the officials are examined. That is the least we should do in the context of this legislation.

If that does not happen and we plough ahead with this, we are simply adding further injustice to an injustice to this family. Farms were lost. Investments were lost. The proof is there to be seen. Will the Minister of State make contact with the officials concerned? Will he invite in the Butlers to hear what they have said, or will he read the transcripts from the finance committee meeting? Will he deal with the questions that were raised and the commitments that were given by the officials to the committee members at that time? If he does not do that, the whole process is just meaningless and lacks any form of democracy or compassion as far as I am concerned. That family and others were invited to give their story to the finance committee because it was felt it was that important.

During the crash, I saw many things happening to families that were questionable. Many of those queries were raised in various committees of this House. Enough of those queries were raised to give concern to the Government and that concern is not being reflected here. At least one of those families I know of is not being treated properly. That is not the way it should be. The vulture funds and so on entered this country, bought properties and treated people badly and we just took it as being the way it was after the crash. Their behaviour here has been utterly despicable and it continues to this day because of the manner in which those staff were trained. Some of those staff have now moved to mainstream banking with the same culture and attitude they experienced when they were with the vulture funds, dealing with NAMA, closing down operations, closing down families and so on. We do not seem to be concerned about that. It is leading a culture that is a legacy of a different time altogether in Ireland. People are still paying that price.

Only this morning I met with families dealing with the vulture funds and whose loans have been transferred. You cannot get information. You cannot get a reasonable person to discuss the issue with you. Everyone is hiding behind GDPR and people are afraid to ask questions. The questions that have been asked should be answered. They will throw light on how other people were treated.

We saw this in relation to the tracker mortgage issue. First there were hundreds. The then Governor of the Central Bank, who is now in the European Central Bank, said there were around 5,000 but it was over 50,000. Had it not been for the members of the finance committee pushing and probing on behalf of individual cases, we would not know the extent of that problem. It is a mark on this State that this is the way citizens were treated. It is a mark on the European Union and the European Central Bank that they would have allowed that to happen. Here we are now doing exactly the same thing, short-changing the people we represent, people who have come to us in good faith, asking for support and help. It is not right that they would be ignored. If they are ignored in the context of this Bill and how it is being pushed through the House, then it is a sorry day for Ireland and for the people concerned.

I do not raise this lightly or say these things lightly. I say it out of experience on that committee, dealing directly with the people concerned. I am giving the Minister of State the example of the tracker mortgage issue to show him how wrong the Central Bank or officials can be - 5,000 versus 50,000. My God, you could not make it up.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Where Deputy John McGuinness ended is a good place for me to start. You could not make it up and that is the truth about NAMA.

Deputy John McGuinness: My socialist colleague over there. There are only two of us left.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Absolutely. If only you had taken the left turn at the right point.

Deputy John McGuinness: I would probably regret that.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: You would be in a different place. We might all be.

When the history books are written, NAMA will go down as one of the greatest scandals ever. I find it pretty amazing, shocking really but maybe not totally surprising, that the Government tries to present it as some sort of success story. The State paid out €31 billion initially to take over the assets of the developers, who had bankrupted the country, leading to a decade of austerity and huge hardship for the country. We paid €31 billion and the Government's argument is that we got it back and we made €5.6 billion on top of it, so everything is fine and we could even put it down as a success.

It was entirely predictable, and some of us predicted it and said it was absolutely clear at the time. The plan for the decision to sell off all those assets to investment funds and vulture funds was hatched when NAMA was originally set up with its mandate in 2009. Most of the sales, and the big push to sell off to the investment funds, happened under the Fine Gael and Labour Party Government that came into power in 2011. I came into the House in 2011 and I remember so well Michael Noonan saying it was necessary to restabilise the Irish property market. At the time some of us said this was a big mistake.

We had the biggest property company in the world. I have been reading over some of the stuff and a huge amount of the property was in the Dublin area where the housing crisis is now concentrated. NAMA had the potential to build about 86,000 housing units. Some of us proposed at that time that all of these should be public and affordable housing. Against this, we can look at what the delivery of public and affordable housing has been in the years intervening. For most of the years of the fire sale to the vulture funds that Michael Noonan invited in, a lot of this was being co-ordinated by a group called the Clearing House Group, which had organised special access to the big companies, the Department of Finance and the Department of Taoiseach at the time. It was essentially writing the budgets. If I remember correctly, in 2013 Michael Noonan met 60 of these investment funds where they planned a massive sell-off of this enormous property portfolio, the biggest property portfolio in the world, to these investment funds.

There was all this potential to deliver housing that could have been public and affordable housing but instead it was given to these investment funds and now we are buying it back. This is what is happening. The local authorities are buying it back and approved housing bodies are buying it back to provide social housing but at the prices set by these developers who got it from us at knockdown prices. The real maths and arithmetic of this is that we paid €31.8 billion and got €5.6 billion in profit, which amounts to €36.4 billion, but in the intervening period

between 2010 and 2025 house prices went up 150%. If we take the figure of €31.8 billion as the bottom of the market for the portfolio - the par value was €70 billion but that is what we paid for it - a 150% increase brings it up to €79.1 billion. We got back €36.4 billion but it went up to at least €79.1 billion and probably more in reality. This is a back of the envelope calculation; it is probably an underestimation of what its actual value was when it was being built out and sold off. The investment funds, the property speculators and the developers walked off with about €42 billion. This is probably a conservative figure but I would say it is the minimum that they walked off with.

This is all maths but I will translate it to Cherrywood, one of the big sites that NAMA took over from developers who helped bankrupt the country. It is the biggest residential development in the country and it is in my area. If we include the really expensive houses, the average price there is €1 million. If we take out the really expensive ones, the average price is €600,000 to €700,000. This is what people have to pay to buy them. This rules out the ability of 80% or 90% of ordinary people to buy them. I would say that roughly 80% to 90% of people could not possibly afford them. This is what they sell for. If we look at houses being sold in Cherrywood at that moment we see they are this price. They were all in our hands.

Not only this but to take Cherrywood as an example, we put €15 million of taxpayers' money into infrastructural funding for that development. The parks and the roads were paid for by the public but the developer walks off with the profits, selling the houses at €600,000 and €700,000. Insofar as we get 10% social housing, we have to pay developers for it at prices they set. We sold for a song. In this case Hines, one of the big investors invited in at the time, sat on it for about ten years. It was in no hurry to build. It was flipping sites. Mel Reynolds reckons that Hines had made profit before a single brick was laid in Cherrywood because it had already started to flip parcels.

TASC has done reports on the wider NAMA portfolio. A lot of the investors who bought had no intention of building; they were just going to hang on until the housing crisis got bad enough that their property investment had increased in value and then they would sell it on. They would sit on it. They wanted to wait and create a housing crisis before they would even consider building or, more likely, flipping it on to somebody else who would then build it out but at massively inflated prices and then we buy it back from them. The Mafia could not have made this one up. We sell it to them at a song, they make massive profit and we buy it back from them.

We paid for the infrastructure. We provided LIHAF funding of €15 million with regard to Cherrywood, to give one example. In the original proposal around LIHAF funding, there was supposed to be a 40% give-back of the development in terms of affordable housing. That was dropped within about four weeks. It was taken off the original LIHAF proposal. We thought it was happy days and that we would get 40% social housing and a big chunk of affordable housing because the State had put in this LIHAF funding. That was then dropped and there was no 40%. We were going to get €15 million worth of affordable housing - in other words, we were going to get back what we put in. This would have been a disgrace but we did not even get that.

Does the Minister of State know how much affordable housing we got in Cherrywood? None, zero, not a single affordable house. It is unbelievable. Developers just do not do it. Not only this but Cherrywood was supposed to be a flagship development and it was not going to

repeat the mistakes of the past. It was to be a new town, the biggest residential development in the country and one of the biggest in Europe. It was going to be a ten-minute town. People would not need a car, and we need to get people out of their cars, because they could walk to everything. There would be parks and infrastructure paid for by the people. There are €600,000 or €700,000 houses, which only a small group of people can afford, and all of the stuff we buy back but at least people would be able to walk to the town centre. There was going to be a town centre.

Does the Minister of State know what the town centre is? It is a massive hole in the ground that the developers refuse to build. It is not profitable for them. They do not want to build a town centre. They have no interest in a town centre. Now they have variations on the strategic development zone in order to increase the density so they can make more profit by building more units on the site, or so it becomes more valuable after it gets the planning permission for it or the change in zoning for it. Their investment increases in value again but the people do not have a town centre.

I will give an example of how ridiculous it is. There is a bridge that carries the Luas from one side to the other.

4 o'clock

There is supposed to be a pedestrian bridge as well because there are people living on the other side. However, the developer does not want to build the pedestrian bridge either because it is connected to the town centre. They just do not want to build it. Young kids are running along the Luas line from one side to the other in what is a serious safety hazard because the only shop is a Spar Express across the road from where the town centre is supposed to be. There is supposed to be a town centre with doctors, cinemas and supermarkets but there is just a big, massive hole in the ground and they are allowed away with it. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael councillors are voting in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown to give them increased densities, so their investments are worth more. You could not make it up.

That is replicated all over the country with the NAMA portfolio. Mel Reynolds estimated that NAMA had 70% of the zoned building land around the greater Dublin area at one point. It was the whole land bank. It dictated what we are seeing now, which is house prices nobody can afford. Who can afford that stuff? The big investment funds can buy it up or the State pays massively over the odds to buy back what it originally sold at a knockdown price. That could all have been social and affordable housing, and we could have solved the housing crisis. Now they have gone through all that and largely made their profits from the NAMA portfolio and we are going to do it again.

We have not learned the lesson of the massive mistake of allowing these guys to run off with all the profits, control the housing sector, drip-feed the housing and profiteer from it and end up selling it back to us at extortionate prices that nobody can afford. They are fuelling the housing and homelessness crisis. We are now going to do it all over again by rezoning a big pile of agricultural land that is currently worth little. We are going to rezone it, so overnight it will be worth a fortune for its private owners, who are all the same people again - the land bankers and the speculators. This is happening as we speak, and I am amazed that nobody is ringing the alarm bells. To my mind, the scandal is beyond belief. This varies but roughly speaking in the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown area zoned agricultural or green space is €80,000

per hectare. If it is zoned as residential that value goes from €80,000 per hectare to €5 million per hectare. That is a 625% increase overnight to the owners of that land. That has just been voted through in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown. It goes without saying that we voted against it. The Fianna Fáilers and Fine Gaelers voted in favour of this. Overnight, the owners get a 625% increase in their investment for doing nothing. They are made multimillionaires but this is not a victimless crime.

Where does the money come from? It is just like what happened with NAMA. Somebody is going to pay for this. The person who is going to pay is the end purchaser of the home or the renter. When the houses are finally built, if they ever are by the way, they will do exactly the same. They have over zoned. This proposal from central government is that the national framework is looking for land for 528,000 new homes and for 15,000 ha to be rezoned. However, the required council land is for 300,000. We are massively over zoning by 50% but the people who own this will be made multimillionaires overnight. As I said, it is a 625% increase.

When and if they build, they will be selling for €600,000, €700,000, €800,000 or €1 million, which is what some of the stuff is now going for in Cherrywood. The ordinary person trying to buy a home pays for this or, because not many working people can afford that, the big investment funds will buy it and rent it out, and they will rent it at €3,000 or €3,500 per month. That is what it is going for in Dun Laoghaire at the moment. They are making an absolute fortune from unaffordable rents and fuelling all the homelessness and despair over extortionate rents that nobody can afford.

That is the increased value that land has now been given because of a vote by a group of councillors in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown. They are going to do the same in South Dublin, Dublin city and in Fingal. That is where that money comes from. It ends up in houses that cost between €600,000 and €800,000 or rents that are €3,000 or €4,000 per month. Ordinary people pay. Maybe, as we did the last time, the State will end up buying it back, instead of us just bringing the agricultural land into public ownership and rezoning what we need to build public and affordable housing. That is what they do in places like Finland where they have actually tackled the housing crisis and reduced homelessness, and where most of the land bank is in the control of the public authorities. It does not mean there is no private housing. I often hear the Government say that we do not want any private housing. That is not true. In Helsinki, the public authorities decide what is built and whether it is going to contribute to providing housing that is needed, is affordable and so on. Here, we just hand it over to the speculators, the hoarders and the profiteers in the property sector. We make people multimillionaires overnight and screw the vast majority of ordinary people who are just looking for an affordable roof over their head.

It is a scandal this is happening when some of us argued way back when that the NAMA mandate should have been changed. We should have developed it as a State construction company and we should have taken the zoned land and the land we are planning to rezone into public ownership to build public and affordable housing. Even now, that is what needs to happen if we are to have any hope of solving the dire housing crisis. That is all history, arithmetic and all the rest of it. However, at the end of the day what it all comes down to is more than 17,000 families in emergency accommodation and thousands of people paying rents they cannot possibly afford. They are paying between 50% and 70% of their income on

unaffordable rents, or people are mortgaged up to their necks. If anything goes wrong with the economy, we will find ourselves right back where we were after the crash in 2008 or 2009. If there is any wobble in the Irish economy and people are landed with these massive debts they cannot afford, we will be right back where we were in the previous crash that sent the entire country over a cliff. Will they ever stop? I do not think so. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are not going to stop.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: He is opposing student housing in his constituency at Baker's Corner. He is a hypocrite.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I wanted it for the students.

An Ceann Comhairle: Excuse me. We have rules, abide on both sides.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: He is talking out of both sides of his mouth.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We wanted it for students.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Hypocrite.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We wanted it in public ownership for the students.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Crowe, leave the House if you cannot abide by the rules. I call Deputy Shay Brennan.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: He is just a profiteer.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Boyd Barrett, Deputy Brennan is on his feet and so am I. Rules are rules.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: He is the one who started it.

Deputy Shay Brennan: I welcome this Bill and am glad to have the opportunity to speak on it today. The dissolution of the National Asset Management Agency is not just an administrative tidying up exercise. I would very much argue that it is a significant milestone in Ireland's post-crisis economic journey. It is a moment that deserves to be acknowledged and understood and not just processed quietly through this House. NAMA was born in crisis. It is ending in recovery. That arc from emergency to resolution is a demonstration of this State's capacity to make hard decisions, to see them through and come out the other side. I will use my time today to review that journey clearly, to acknowledge the scale of what was achieved, to be honest about the controversy that surrounded it and to say something about why the transfer of remaining functions to the NTMA is the right and appropriate conclusion.

To understand NAMA's achievement we have to go back to where we were in 2009 and 2010. The global economy was in free-fall. The property market had collapsed with

catastrophic force. Our financial system was sitting on tens of billions of euro in loans that were worth a fraction of what they had been written at. The guarantee of 2008 had bought some time but that time alone was not going to fix the fundamental problem of a banking system paralysed by bad debt, unable to function, unable to lend and unable to support the real economy. The question facing the Government of the day was stark. Should it let the banks collapse, should it nationalise everything outright or should it create a mechanism to extract the toxic assets from the balance sheets, allow the banks to stabilise and manage the recovery of those assets over time in a way that maximised returns to the taxpayer? The decision was to create NAMA. It was not a popular one. It was deeply controversial from the moment it was announced. There were legitimate questions raised in Dáil Éireann and across the country about the haircuts applied to the loans, transparency, who was benefiting and who was bearing the cost. I do not dismiss those questions. Many of them were asked in good faith and deserved serious answers, but the judgment of time has been clear that the decision to establish NAMA was the correct one.

Let us review what NAMA achieved, because the numbers are remarkable and deserve to be stated clearly. NAMA acquired loans with the nominal value of approximately €74 billion. It paid about €32 billion for those loans, which was a discount reflecting their distressed nature. Over its lifetime, it generated a surplus income for the State of over €4 billion. An agency created in the depths of a financial crisis to manage what were essentially the worst excesses of the Irish property and banking sectors turned a profit of over €4 billion for the taxpayer. That was not the expectation of many commentators in 2010. It was not even the central expectation of many supporters of the agency. It is an extraordinary outcome.

NAMA's contribution was not only financial. It played a crucial role in stabilising the property market. By managing the disposal of assets in an orderly, phased way rather than dumping them on the market simultaneously, NAMA helped prevent the kind of catastrophic price collapse a disorderly liquidation would have caused. That discipline and patience protected the value of assets held not just by NAMA but across the entire economy. NAMA also became, perhaps unexpectedly, one of the most significant funders of residential construction in Ireland during the recovery period. It funded the delivery of tens of thousands of homes, contributed directly to social and affordable housing through local authorities and approved housing bodies and helped unlock development on key strategic sites around the country. This is a substantial part of NAMA's legacy that deserves recognition, particularly in the context of the ongoing housing challenges. I should note that NAMA managed a geographically complex portfolio, with assets in Britain, across continental Europe and in the United States, and did so with commercial discipline and without the fire sale disposal many feared. It was studied internationally as a model for how a state asset management vehicle can be structured and governed effectively. NAMA staff and management should be commended on that.

There is an aspect of NAMA's legacy that rarely gets the credit it deserves, namely, what it did for Ireland's reputation internationally. In 2010, we were a country the international markets had effectively written off. The interest rates being demanded on our sovereign debt were excessive. The establishment of NAMA and, critically, its credible and professional operation over subsequent years were part of the signal to international investors that Ireland was serious, we had a plan and we intended to honour our obligations. Neither the return to

the bond markets, nor the exit from the Troika programme, nor the restoration of our sovereign credit rating happened in isolation. NAMA was part of the scaffolding that made that possible.

I want to be fair-minded and not simply eulogise without acknowledgement of the real concerns that were raised over the years. In the interest of balance it would not be right to speak about NAMA without noting that it was not without its difficulties along the way. Questions were raised at various points in this House and before the public accounts committee, and that scrutiny was appropriate and right. No agency operating at this scale under this kind of pressure and over this length of time could expect to do so entirely without controversy and NAMA was no different. The fair reflection with the benefit of hindsight is simply that transparency and public accountability are always worth strengthening in bodies of this kind and that there is always room for a better balancing of commercial sensitivity with public oversight. That is a lesson worth keeping in mind for the future. Those questions, fairly asked and properly pursued, do not diminish the overall record. They are part of how democratic oversight is supposed to function. The agency's fundamental achievements stand on their own terms.

The overall verdict on NAMA must be judged on outcomes and the outcomes it delivered. This brings me to where we are today and the specific provisions of the Bill. NAMA has substantially completed its work. The vast majority of its loan portfolio has been disposed of. Its active commercial function is at an end and what remains are a small number of residual assets, ongoing commitments in relation to certain legacy matters and a staff complement that has reduced dramatically from the agency's peak. The Bill provides for the dissolution of NAMA and the transfer of its remaining functions, assets and staff to the National Treasury Management Agency. This is entirely sensible. The NTMA is the appropriate home for these residual functions.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is the Deputy sharing with Deputy Crowe?

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Yes. I only need a little more time.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: All right.

Deputy Shay Brennan: It has the governance structures, the financial expertise and the institutional capacity to manage what remains in a cost-effective and accountable way. Keeping a separate statutory agency alive with its own board, overheads and administrative infrastructure when the substantive work is done would be a waste of public resources. The model of a time-limited, purpose-specific vehicle has been vindicated. NAMA was designed to do a job and then to go. It is now going and that is exactly as it should be.

The transfer of staff deserves a specific mention. The men and women who worked in NAMA, particularly those who joined at the height of the crisis, took on a difficult and sometimes thankless task in a highly charged public environment. Many of them were working on complex financial, legal and property matters under significant public scrutiny and, at times, criticism. They served the State well. The transition to the NTMA should be managed with full respect for their rights and their service. I ask the Minister of State to confirm appropriate protections and continuity of terms are in place for all staff affected.

I will say a final word about what the passing of this Bill means because it is worth slowing down to reflect on. In 2010 when NAMA was being established, there were serious commentators – serious, informed people – who doubted Ireland could manage its way out of the crisis without a decade of depression, a sovereign default and a managed restructuring of the State's obligations. The scale of what we were facing was overwhelming but we did not default or collapse and we stabilised our banks, managed our debt, returned to the markets, exited the Troika programme and rebuilt.

I support the Bill. I commend the work of those who designed and managed NAMA over its lifetime. I welcome the transfer to the NTMA as a logical, efficient and appropriate conclusion to the agency's existence. I take this moment to note for the record of the House that Ireland's response to one of the gravest financial crises in our history was not perfect, as nothing ever is, but it was, by any fair measure, a success.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I thank my colleague for sharing time with me. This is a very important Bill and I welcome the opportunity to speak on it. As Deputy Brennan said, nothing in this time was perfect but the State had to very quickly step in and decide how we could manage assets at a time of global financial crisis. Since then, NAMA has been lauded internationally as one of the best structures put in place during the economic crash of those years to manage state assets. I can only think of one comparable initiative. A few years prior to the economic crash, I was an Erasmus student in the Czech Republic, which only seven or eight years previously had emerged from communism to stand on its own two feet as a democratic country. It was also a fledgling EU nation at the time following the passing of the Nice treaty. The country had to bring in mechanisms to stop people from overseas purchasing properties at knockdown prices as it wanted its own people to have the properties. It seemed a very sensible approach and it too has since been wound back.

It makes sense to wind back NAMA. It was a solid way to manage State assets at that time. It is worth noting the agency took on a loan book with a par value of €74 billion. This comprised 60,000 properties and 5,000 borrowers. Over its lifetime, it repaid all €32 billion in debt issued to acquire loans and has been fully financially sustainable throughout that time.

This is good legislation. NAMA may not have been popular initially, but it has certainly proved its worth. It has been shown to be a good, solid and stable basis on which to manage assets during a time of crisis.

Charges were made moments ago about how developments happen in south Dublin. I was a school teacher. Many of my past pupils are gearing up for their leaving certificate examinations and they will make choices over the coming weeks about what college they will go to. God help them if they are going to college in Dublin. A development called Baker's Corner, with 300 student accommodation beds, was planned in south Dublin. The lead objector to that development, which took it through the wringer and all the way to An Coimisiún Pleanála, or An Bord Pleanála as it was then known, was Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett. I will quote from his appeal. It stated: "It is much too large and will be very much out of character with ... the 2 storey houses and Ashbury Nursing Home". When students from County Clare are looking for accommodation this year, they should remember that this project has been held up for five years, and it may never see the light of day, because of the hypocrisy of one of the Members of this House.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: We are talking about NAMA and its winding up. It is easy to wind up something when people would not talk to you. I will give a small bit of history, without mentioning names, of a case to do with the likes of NAMA and it not interacting with people in their times of trouble. I am talking about people who were in trouble in 2016, like a lot of other people in the country, and there was a judgment against them. The judgment was for €55,000, which was the sum owed. The order for interest was €9,000. In 2016, these people entered into a payment plan to get back on their feet. About a year into it, when they got back on their feet, they tried to get through to NAMA and the financial institution to do a deal on how they could finish their loan book. I have the file in front of me. The dates are from early 2016, and these people still have their payment plan in place today. They still cannot get a meeting with NAMA to finish up their accounts. We are talking about 2016, so we are ten years on, and the balance on their account is now just under €55,000. This is the amount for which the first judgment was brought against these people in 2016.

We are winding up something that we said was a great thing at the time and that took on all the different purchases. How many cases have been in the Supreme Court concerning loan books that were sold off by NAMA and the likes of Pepper that were brought in? They were working in this country illegally during the first 12 months because they did not have 12 months of accounts done. How many High Court battles were lost over that? How many people's properties were taken because of the likes of NAMA? People wanted to enter into agreements to save their businesses and houses. How many of those people were there? What is going to be done now? NAMA is going to be dissolved and the buck is going to be passed to somebody else. Nobody else will talk to these people and somebody else will get paid again to deal with something that was not dealt with in the first place.

Last year, we had a case where the Supreme Court overruled some of the financial institutions that got their loan books through NAMA. They were found guilty of taking properties during the first 12 months of their existence. What is going to happen with those properties? What is going to happen with the livelihoods that were lost because people in NAMA would not talk to these people? What are we going to do with those people? Who is going to reimburse them now? Who is going to deal with the portfolio involving those people who were never talked to? It is another thing that we will sweep under the carpet. We will get rid of it and we will now put something else in its place to take on the last of the loan books and assets NAMA has. There is no accountability.

Are the people who were involved in this institution going to get promoted? Will they get Government jobs in different Departments? Will they get promotions in which they can excel in their careers after NAMA? That is where we see problems arising from this. An awful lot of people in NAMA have to account for things they have done wrong. They may have got a couple of bits and pieces right and may have dealt with different people in different ways, but they also left behind the good, hard-working people who wanted to fix up their books. They will not be forgiven for it and nor will the Government.

Deputy Michael Collins: I will start where Deputy O'Donoghue left off in his excellent speech. I will just give an overview of where people stand in relation to NAMA. This Bill marks what the Government will present as a final chapter in the State's response to the banking collapse. We are being asked to wind up NAMA and transfer what remains of the IBRC into

the NTMA to close the emergency structures created during one of the darkest periods in our financial history. In principle, that is the right thing to do. These bodies were always meant to be temporary.

We need to be clear that while the Government is closing the institutions of the crisis, the people are still paying for it. Nowhere is this more obvious or more unjust than in the ongoing existence of the universal social charge. The USC was introduced as a temporary emergency tax. The public were told it was temporary and necessary in a time of crisis and it would be removed when the crisis passed. The Government is telling us today that the crisis is over, NAMA is being shut down and the IBRC is being wrapped up. We are being told the clean-up is complete. Here is the simple question. If the crisis is over, why is the USC still being taken out of workers' wages every week? We have to be honest about it. The USC has become a permanent tax by stealth. It is no longer an emergency measure and no longer temporary. It is now baked into the system, quietly taking from pay packets across the country. The people who are paying it are the very same people who had no role whatsoever in causing the banking collapse. They are ordinary workers and families trying to make ends meet, people in communities all over Ireland who were already stretched and are stretched even further now with the cost of living. They did their part, carried the burdens and paid what they were asked to pay, and now, when the State is closing the very institution that justified that USC charge, these same people are being told that nothing changes for them.

This is not fairness or honesty, and the public can see straight through it. If NAMA can be wound up and the IBRC can be consigned to history, the Government needs to explain why one of the most visible symbols of that crisis, the USC, remains firmly in place. Otherwise, people will rightly conclude that while the crisis may be over for the State, it is not over for them.

That brings us back to the Bill, which transfers enormous powers to the NTMA, including litigation, asset management and broad confidentiality provisions. As we do that, we must not allow transparency to disappear along with NAMA. We need firm guarantees that the Oireachtas will retain real oversight, reporting will be full and accessible and every remaining asset, liability and legal matter is fully accounted for. The taxpayers paid for this system and the taxpayers deserve the full truth at the end.

We should complete the wind-down of NAMA and close these bodies, but the public should not be asked to accept closure when they are still footing the bill. The end of the banking crisis must mean something real for people who paid for it. That means not just shutting down institutions but finally addressing the unfair, so-called temporary burdens that were supposed to go with those institutions.

Deputy O'Donoghue raised the issue of the good, honest business people and householders who tried their level best to communicate with NAMA and get out of a crisis. Not everybody wants to screw the State, to use an unsavoury word, and not everybody has that in mind, but people do fall into difficulties. Like the Minister of State and many other Deputies, I have dealt with numerous people in that situation who wanted to pay their way out, and sit down and do a deal, but who were refused by NAMA and the vulture funds. It was all one big happy connection. It was a case of grabbing people's property, putting them out of business and destroying their lives. How many people have died because of this? It is an astonishing question to ask, but I guarantee the Government has no understanding. How many people died

in despair? How many people went home and ended their lives? The Government is afraid to answer that question because it is a true fact.

It is a fact. They lost their lives because they lost their businesses and homes. They begged for help but they got nothing in return from a State that cost them their lives. It cost people their businesses but, more importantly, it cost people their lives. It is astonishing that it will never, ever be known. It is the hidden secret and crisis of this country, where people would not sit down with those who were facing difficult times because they borrowed. They over-borrowed. I accept that but they wanted to negotiate their way out. That was true of so many of them I met and on whose behalf I pleaded but we were met with deaf ears. It is an awful situation for people to find themselves in, about to lose the home their children are living in or their business that provides food for their families, be they man or woman. I represented so many of them. I saw them and I know where they ended up because of it and that is a shocking indictment of a Government that does not care.

The USC is a pittance for the Government to hand back to the State after what it has taken from people and what it has cost this country. That was under the leadership of Fianna Fáil. The bodies in place, whether vulture funds or NAMA, should have sat down with the people who wanted to sit down and found a way forward, rather than just grabbing. Let us call them what they were - vultures. That is what they turned out to be.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: First, I want to acknowledge, given the headline topic we are discussing, that NAMA played an important stabilising role at a moment of national crisis. I was there at the time and was involved in the Government that made the decisions. I saw the logic and supported its establishment at the time under the circumstances that were forced on people. However, it is also clear that NAMA's record is mixed, due to what were largely Government decisions. I acknowledge that NAMA had an independent mandate but it was given a mandate and terms of reference and because of that, there were opportunities that were not fully realised.

Those broader questions deserve a fuller debate in their own right. I would love to talk for an hour on it and maybe we will get that chance some time. I will use some of my time to focus on that but first I acknowledge that we are dealing with the final narrow phase of NAMA's existence and the transfer of its remaining functions to other bodies. What is left are residual loans and I hope that where small people are impacted, they get a good shout. There is a whole load of outstanding legal cases and other stuff which, one could argue, does not require a stand-alone agency any more and all of the bureaucratic costs associated with it. On that point and purely on the specifics, the Bill before us makes sense. Transferring the remaining functions to the NTMA allows for a streamlined transition.

However, it is important that we assess the NAMA legacy honestly. While it did make a paper return of €4 billion, it did not realise the full potential of the assets it was entrusted with managing. It also did not necessarily help people who could have been dug out of a hole, individuals and small businesses, rather than the big entities which some of my colleagues have referenced. The fact that NAMA did not realise its potential is not just my opinion as a TD but is borne out by the market evidence and assessments of independent observers. Between 2013 and 2015, NAMA sold some of the largest loan portfolios in the history of the State. According to the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council, commercial property values in

Dublin rose by over 70% between 2013 and 2018, while development land values in some areas more than doubled. Many of the assets that later benefited from that recovery had already been sold off by NAMA. While I acknowledge that everything is better in hindsight, we should be able to look at the bigger picture. In hindsight, they were sold at massively discounted prices. *The Irish Times* reported in 2016 that several major portfolios sold to international investment funds were subsequently resold at profits ranging from 30%, which is not half-bad when one thinks about it, to over 100% in some cases, often within a few years. The public accounts committee in its 2017 review noted that significant value uplift accrued to purchasers rather to the State. Basically, the State exited too early.

We know that NAMA's mandate pushed it towards rapid de-leveraging rather than long-term value creation. The agency itself stated in its 2014 annual report that it was accelerating disposals to meet debt repayment targets. Those targets, to be clear, were shaped largely by the political and institutional environment of the time which rewarded early repayment and visible progress.

I would argue that it was more on the political side because the Government of the day wanted to be able to say that it had made progress in advance of the 2016 election, even if that meant forgoing future gains. If one was looking at it from the perspective of what is in the best interests of the country rather than in the best interests of those going into the next election, one might have said we should wait a little bit longer. It is a fair question to ask whether the State could have earned more by holding assets for longer or by retaining the income-producing properties for rental yield. Experts who know a lot more than I do would argue that was the case and the evidence also suggests so. The ESRI, for example, in its 2019 analysis of post-crisis asset management said that a longer-term hold strategy would likely have produced higher net returns for the State, particularly in the residential and office sectors.

None of this is to deny the challenges we faced, the pressure from Europe and the ECB or the constraints that NAMA operated under but we must learn from this. How far back do we go? If one wanted to be fair minded, one could argue that successive Fianna Fáil administrations made the boom boomier. The larger political parties at the time had a very close relationship with developers. Some of those relationships were examined in tribunals and even if we did not get to the levels of outright corruption, there was a cosy consensus with developers and Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in particular. That kind of consensus led to decisions that massively increased the value of land for certain developers and led to speculation. It got to the stage that by 2006, most of the State's revenues were coming through services. In the 2008 and 2009 period, we absolutely had global pressures and a global collapse. It was not, obviously, endemic to Ireland *per se* but the crash was made crashier because of previous Fianna Fáil policies in particular.

I was in one of the Government parties at the time. We had some very serious decisions to make and we made them. I remember having a meeting two years before the 2011 general election and saying that it looked like we were all going to lose our seats. I asked what we were going to do and suggested that we should try to do what was best for the country, one way or the other. I know that every grouping in government at that time - and I pay tribute to the late Brian Lenihan - was trying to doing its best in the circumstances. The bank guarantee scheme, in hindsight, may not have been absolutely necessary. We do not know if some of the banks were systemic banks or not. All we know is that we could not have taken that risk. The

former Deputy, Eamon Gilmore, said it was either Frankfurt's way or Labour's way but it turned out to be Frankfurt's way. The Troika came in and told us precisely what to do. We could not afford to do what the Greeks did and, indeed, they lost out down the line in any event. The European Central Bank and our European Union partners were prepared to give us a dig out but not in a way that would put themselves into discomfort. We were forced into a situation in 2009 and 2010 where, if we did not make decisions that hurt people, it was going to hurt people a lot more. That is not a great position to be in. We still have the legacy of that, with nurses, gardaí and teachers on starting incomes that are a lot less than they should be. I have called for that pay restoration several times.

That has not happened and then we wonder why there are recruitment issues.

Coming back to the present, we could have had additional funds for the State if NAMA had been handled in a more assessable way. We should have looked at the situation in 2013, 2014 and 2015 and, noting the trend was upwards, we should have said, "Let us hang on and let us realise more for the State, rather than trying to make a political point in advance of the election". If we are to learn from this experience, we must acknowledge that the agency's potential was not fully realised and that was because of politics rather than best practice. I hope we never again get into a scenario in which we are put under global pressure. If we have to create another NAMA in the future, we must look at it in a more strategic way and consider what outcomes to seek and whether we can change the system as we go along to realise the best outcome for the people of the country. We were sold short. NAMA made an extra €4 billion in terms of the paper assessment of the value of its assets at the time but a lot of income was left behind that could have been gained for the people.

Deputy Thomas Gould: When NAMA came into being, the State was in a really dark place. The economy had collapsed, there were no jobs and people were really struggling. We had ghost estates and sites that were half developed. Fianna Fáil destroyed the economy. I remember it as clear as day. I remember friends of mine losing their jobs. To add insult to injury, when Fine Gael came into government in 2011, all it gave a damn about was austerity. The ordinary working men and women of this country were thrown under a bus. The most vulnerable, including pensioners and people with disabilities, suffered the most. I remember that.

Now the economy is going well and there are jobs, but a lot of people are struggling more than ever. There are empty houses on a huge scale but there still are ghost estates, including in Carrignavar and right across the State. There is a site not far from here in Dublin Central that has been empty for ten years. It could be used to build public homes for the families and workers in Dublin who need them. Empty NAMA sites were sold off across the State and they are being sat on by speculators and vulture funds as they laugh all the way to the bank.

I was elected to Cork City Council in 2009. I remember clearly the devastation caused by austerity at that time. Then Michael Noonan rolled out the red carpet for the vulture funds to come in and operate tax free. To this day, they still operate on a tax-free basis. The Government lets them off. The ordinary working men and women, however, are not free of tax. They still have to pay the USC. We are here today to talk about the winding down of NAMA. Why is there no winding down of the USC? Why is it always ordinary hard-working people who must

foot the bill while the bankers, developers, speculators and vulture funds laugh all the way to the bank?

The CEO of NAMA is moving to the NTMA on a salary of €430,000. All the NAMA staff will keep their terms and conditions of employment. I do not know what the CEO will be doing in his new role. He could be over there making tea. How can his appointment be justified? People are being laid off this week at Meta. Ambulance drivers are out fighting for their rights, and have been fighting for years, but the Government will not give them the terms and conditions to which they are entitled. However, there are jobs for the NAMA lads. They can be given anything they want. Where is the fairness?

I recall standing on the picket lines with the Debenhams workers. When the Vita Cortex workers lost their jobs years ago, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael said they would make changes to legislation to protect workers. They still have not done it. Instead, they gave sweetheart deals to big business and vulture funds that picked NAMA dry. "Vulture funds" is the perfect name because they cleaned out NAMA. Deputy Doherty will soon table amendments, which we believe are fair and right, to protect workers. I know people who lost their jobs and houses and whose marriage or relationship ended. They lost everything. I know people who died by suicide as a result of the banking and financial crisis. We should never forget that Europe threw us under the bus. We were the only country that took on all our debt, while others were given a way out. NAMA might be gone but the USC is still here.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: My colleague Deputy Toole cannot make it to the Chamber as she is stuck in traffic. She asked me to convey her hope that some of the extra funds that become available as a result of the wind-down of NAMA will be ring-fenced for projects in her constituency. She hopes the Navan rail project, for which a preferred route was announced today, is one of the projects for which the funding now arising out of this sorry saga is ring-fenced.

I am glad to have an opportunity to speak on this Bill, which brings about the final winding down of NAMA and the transfer of all remaining matters to the NTMA. As I have said many times in this House, the legacy of NAMA is a trail of destruction left behind for families, villages and towns across the country. Under the guise of a workout vehicle, it has been the most economically destructive agency in Ireland's history. It has been the catalyst for the disastrous housing crisis that has plagued us. I said that last night and have been saying it for the past year. I pay tribute to the late Brian Lenihan for the efforts he made. I said to him here late one night that NAMA was like a wild animal being released in the woods and no one knew where it would end up.

There are very many human stories arising out of NAMA, many of which are still unresolved. There have been many claims of corruption and fraudulent activity, which has gone on without anybody being held to account. NAMA has a very poor history. No State-sponsored and State-staff vehicle should be able to perform fraudulent activities without being held accountable or punished. I want to put on the record again one of those human stories, as I have many times before. I refer to the story of John Fraher, an excellent businessman from Clonmel, County Tipperary. I have raised his case directly with the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste, the finance committee and the head of Revenue. The issue continues to be ignored and swept

under the carpet. The fear with NAMA being dissolved is that issues like this will remain firmly under the carpet and there will be no accountability for anyone.

John Fraher has received a letter from Revenue that is quite alarming. I have to hand a document from which I will quote the following paragraph:

I have raised the matter of fraudulent transactions involving NAMA in the past and the matter is so serious that it brings into focus the reason that NAMA was staffed by NTMA employees. It is a perfect case of a Department of Finance-sponsored system that could perform transactions and would never be prosecuted or held to account as the gatekeeper and enforcement agency of the State was compromised from the start.

I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for his excellent work in this area. I also must mention the Butler family in Clonmel, who were blackguarded. Many families have been destroyed. There have been marriage separations and families split. Many people have taken their own lives. I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for his work at the finance committee and for being brave in trying to get answers.

The document in my hand further states: "The Department of Finance could control each element of the system and ensure that each transaction was rubber-stamped by Revenue, regardless of whether it was legal or not". That is hard to understand. I now refer to a Revenue Commissioners' Collector General receipt, dated 21 February 2015, notice No. 0973138/001310. This receipt was provided to National Asset Loan Management Limited. The receipt was based on a ROS payment dated 16 February 2015 made by National Asset Loan Management Limited. NAMA attached a letter to Revenue to explain the payment made.

The letter was signed by a Ms Teresa Talbot, head of tax. In regard to the letter dated 16 February 2015, the details provided to Revenue are not true. They are downright false. The Chairman of Revenue is fully aware of the 2015 transaction I am referring to. The fraudulent scheme began with a false transaction that allowed a sequence of transactions to occur which involved, among other things, VAT fraud. I raised this here countless times. An Garda Síochána told me it cannot investigate it. The EU Commissioner, the Minister of State's former colleague, raised this question here on several occasions as finance spokesman before he left to go to his European post.

Another example of a Revenue-generated document that arises from the original fraud by the National Asset Loan Management Limited is a stamp duty certificate dated 13 April 2015, stamp certificate ID150441576/81B3090415/J. The Department of Finance is attempting to destroy any trace of fraudulent activities by removing NAMA and its various entities and providing cover for all State employees who carried out or assisted in that fraud.

This is a shocking situation that we are passing Second Stage of this Bill today. There are families who are traumatised. As others have said, we are paying the USC, which was a temporary measure to pay for all of this. There was fraud, money was made and illegal transactions were carried out and a blind eye was turned to this. It is just a shocking vendetta.

The Bill dissolves NAMA and transfers everything, including unresolved litigation which will extend beyond the formal wind down of the agency but it will not take into account the fraudulent activities which happened under its watch. I ask the Minister of State to answer those questions.

There are many Johnny Frahers in this country, as I said. I could name dozens of them. We had the Clonmel Arms project. I called it project jackdaw. There was scurrilous interference with properties of NAMA. We got the information when there was a buyer trying to buy it. The Butler family was mentioned. I know countless families from all over the country as the Minister of State must too. Michael Noonan would not talk to anyone at the time and said the vulture funds were necessary. Anyone who rears sheep or knows anything about country living knows the vulture is the most despicable bird or creature given its very name. He told his own backbenchers to ignore any families that came to them. We had the case of a wonderful auctioneer in Cashel, Mr. De Vere Hunt, who ended up in his grave as a result of NAMA. His wife came in to testify in front of the Leas-Cheann Comhairle, who was Chair of a committee, but it was blocked. It was thanks to the Leas-Cheann Comhairle that she came in for a private session and had her say. People were brought to tears listening to her story. There are hundreds of those stories up and down the country. These are lives wrecked and ruined.

When the Government tells us the NTMA will now take over all remaining matters, what guarantees do people like Mr. Fraher and the other families have that their cases will finally be treated fairly and people will be held to account for any wrongdoing? What assurances are there that the mistakes of NAMA will not simply be inherited and quietly buried? I think that is what is going to happen. I am very concerned about it.

The Bill states that the NTMA will be substituted for NAMA in all proceedings and that no cause of action will be taken against the NTMA solely by reason of the transfer. That is a nice way of getting out of all of this and leaving it behind. That may protect the State but who protects the citizens who have been destroyed by this? Who protects the people who pay the USC every week? Nobody does. This is a shocking vista.

We are now going to have it all buried and we are going to pay the CEO even though there is no job for him in the NTMA. We are going to give him more than €400,000 a year. In God's name, are the lunatics running the asylum? Are we so badly off and unaccountable that we allow this to happen? Who ensures that the unresolved grievances - and there are thousands of them - the very ones I have raised for years are not lost in the reshuffle? There is a deliberate ploy that we will be lost.

I want to be very clear I am not opposing the idea of winding down NAMA. I opposed it being set up. I am worried that proper transparency and accountability will not transfer with it. I am opposing the attempt to use this dissolution as a way of dissolving responsibility. The people affected by NAMA and the citizens deserve closure, support, counselling and to have some modicum of their lives back.

Transparency is essential but it is a very scarce item in this House with this Government and with successive governments. Too much of NAMA's work was hidden behind confidentiality. If we are closing this chapter, the truth must be allowed to come out. Some media outlets have shown interest here but editorials will not allow them to publish it. The fear of the big hand, the might of money and the threats is there.

I will continue to raise this case and others like it until the State acknowledges the human cost of decisions made by NAMA and IRBC. I will support any measure that brings fairness, accountability and closure but I will not support a process that simply dissolves the entity while dissolving responsibility along with it.

We have to be very careful here. This is a nice, glossy Bill. I heard the Minister of State's speech and other speeches as well. I know of so many cases. I raise the case of the Poppyfield Retail Park in Clonmel. That scheme was the brainchild of Mr. Fraher. I refer to what went on there and the transfer of lands and yet hotels are operating without planning permission and no fire certificate. I do not want to damage a hotel that provides a great service and has great employees but I refer to the sheer corruption with the transfer of that land, money changing hands and it being all hush hush. You cannot get answers. An Garda Síochána is refusing to investigate this. I was told by the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and others to go to the gardaí. Revenue has refused to meet Mr. Fraher, me or anyone. It is hoping this will all go away like snow off a ditch. There will be a long summer, and thank God the weather is picking up today. However, this is not going to go away. It was wrong from the start but it is even more wrong now that we would push this aside and place it into this new agency that we do not have faith in either and give the employees there *carte blanche* and good jobs. It is shocking.

Again, I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle, who was one of the Government TDs who tried to assist families. He and I met with some of them. We have Professor Honohan's report and what he brought to light and the total unfairness in the courts.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am glad to get the opportunity to say a few words. As many others have said, those ten years were an awful time in the lives of many people in our country. Many people lost their homes and lands and, worse than that, they lost their marriages and some of them lost their children. They lost everything. Some even lost their lives. It was a terrible time and NAMA was a word many people regretted and resented. I refer to the liquidators, vulture funds and the things that happened. As I said, homes were taken. The thing I worried about most was that there was no court order in many cases. Liquidators and receivers took it upon themselves to close the book on people and sell their properties. There are many instances where the former owners attempted to buy back their property from the receiver but they were not allowed to do so because the receiver had favourites to whom to sell it to - maybe to their own families. That needs to be followed up. Where a property or a home was sold and there was no court order, that needs to be investigated because that was totally wrong.

5 o'clock

They should have been engaged with and it should have gone through the courts to ensure it was proper. I cannot understand how a deed could be taken from someone and passed on to someone else. Were new deeds written or what happened that new people could take over a person's land while that person still had the deed and the courts never took them? I cannot understand that.

Like many others have said, the universal social charge was brought in at the time of financial difficulty to try to keep the country running. There is no need for it now and many working-class people are still suffering. I do not understand why the Government is closing the book on NAMA. I am worried that there are still people who may not have been dealt with properly and that we will be closing some legal gap for them to come back and fight their cases and maybe get their property, or the value of it, back. I am worried about it. I am not sure about it.

Like Deputy Mattie McGrath, I thank Deputy John McGuinness for the fearless way he dealt with many people as Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts and the tough questions

that had to be asked and answered. I appreciate him for being straightforward and as honest as he could, regardless of where it left him.

I have a special hatred for vulture funds. There should be no place for them. If people had engaged or dealt with the banks to get loans or mortgages, the banks should still be looking for the repayments and not vulture funds because the vulture funds did desperate things to people. They forced and blackguaranteed people and did everything in the world to people. I regret and resent that. I will always remember it as a desperate, undemocratic time in the lives of people all over the country.

I hope that the fact there was no court order in many instances will be dealt with because many people will not be dealt with fairly until that has been tested. Many people were left behind and dealt with wrongly where there was no court order. Their places were put up for sale with a certain auction date, perhaps not even advertised publicly enough. Their places were sold behind their backs in many instances, without going through any court or any judge making an order that their properties, houses or land could be sold. I hope some day those people will get fairness and retribution for what happened to them. I am sorry for the people who lost their lives and marriages. Losing property is one thing, but families and lives are much more precious than anything material. So much happened that I am not sure why the Government is doing this.

There is another aspect. Who decided that this chairman, CEO or whatever he will be, will get more than €400,000? Why does it have to be that amount of money? No man or woman in the State is worth that kind of money. When I think of all the people who suffered financially, it might have been for small sums of money when we look back on it. This is a massive sum of money to be giving to one man and making a job for him. The Government will not get much praise for this because it is another big job for one of the boys and I could not stand over that. I could not vote for that and I will not be voting for it either. I cannot see that it is fair on the people who suffered over the years, especially in the past ten or 15 years.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Robert Troy): I thank all the Members for their contributions. I will endeavour to reply to all the points that were raised. I will do it just to myself and the Leas-Cheann Comhairle by the looks of things, but the Leas-Cheann Comhairle did contribute. I say that somewhat in jest because I acknowledge that many Deputies are tuned in in their offices and that not everyone can sit in the Dáil for hours at a time.

The question "why now?" has been asked a number of times. The reason is that NAMA and the IBRC special liquidators have now substantially completed their mandates and are reaching the final stage of their life cycle. That is why the Bill is being proposed at this stage. I acknowledge that although many people have been critical in some of their commentary today, no one has indicated outright that they will vote against the legislation. Certainly, the three main Opposition parties have indicated their support for it.

As I mentioned earlier, it is appropriate that any remaining matters - particularly litigation - are managed within a streamlined structure. The Bill provides a practical approach to achieving this, while ensuring continuity and legal certainty for all parties and preserving existing rights and obligations. The NTMA is well placed to take on this role. The residual activity it is taking on will be ring-fenced within the NTMA. It has the governance, expertise and experience

required to manage complex financial and legal matters to completion, while avoiding the cost and duplication of maintaining separate structures which are no longer required, given the reduced scale of the remaining activity.

It is worth going back to look at the mandate that was set for NAMA, which was to get the best return achievable for the State. NAMA began by de-leveraging its overseas portfolio in 2012, where the recovery was stronger. Then, in Ireland, as recovery began to take hold, it de-leveraged more domestically and debtors were in a position to refinance. It is worth noting, as was referenced by a number of contributors, that an independent report by Professor FitzGerald found that NAMA was broadly successful and the Comptroller and Auditor General last week reported that NAMA achieved higher returns than originally projected. Had NAMA sat on assets indefinitely, other charges would have been made, with people asking why NAMA was not trying to realise and pay back the money the State had invested.

NAMA was established with a specific mandate. It made a significant social and economic contribution. It achieved a €5.6 billion surplus. It supported the delivery of more than 45,500 houses, contributed to Dublin Docklands regeneration and a number of houses and lands were transferred to the Land Development Agency, which will contribute to the delivery of further houses in the years ahead.

Some contributors asked about pre-legislative scrutiny. I understand the Tánaiste has written to the Chair of the joint committee on finance to respond comprehensively. If any of the Deputies on that committee did not get the response, we will be happy to ensure they do. The Department of Finance will continue the oversight and governance throughout the final drawdown and completion.

A number of people mentioned the number of staff. Eight staff will work in the resolution unit to work through the remaining matters. This will not include the current CEO, who is an NTMA employee. He was always an NTMA employee and will return to the NTMA on an individual contract.

Deputy O'Callaghan mentioned ISIF investments. The residual activity from NAMA and the IBRC is ringfenced in the NTMA and will not be part of the broader NTMA portfolio. Deputy Healy-Rae will be pleased to note that the Bill does not contain any provisions relating to staff, including terms and conditions. Staff who were assigned to NAMA were originally employed by the NTMA and, therefore, there is no legislative transfer of staff.

PTSB was raised. One of the Government's objectives in regard to PTSB was to maximise the value achieved from the sale to recover taxpayer funds and deploy these to more productive purposes. The BAWAG has confirmed it will operate PTSB as a bank with long-term and clear objectives and this is an opportunity to present a credible challenger to AIB and Bank of Ireland. Its plan is to maintain a meaningful branch footprint. A number of Deputies referred to the importance of having competition in the banking sector, which is a consideration for the Minister for Finance.

I cannot comment on individual cases as that would not be right or proper. I do not have knowledge of individual cases Deputies have raised but I can confirm that there will be full continuity. Nobody will be prejudiced by the transfer of activities. The NTMA is simply stepping into the role of NAMA. Everybody's rights will be preserved, and equally everybody's obligations will also be preserved.

On the query from Deputy McGuinness, I will undertake to follow up with officials and respond to him directly. A number of Deputies spoke about funds and the funds industry, and portrayed funds as something negative to be investing in in this country. As Minister with responsibility for financial services, I know first hand the importance of the funds industry to this country. The funds industry is very much a pillar of the financial services sector of our economy through funds administration, asset management, risk and compliance and legal and financial advisories. It provides 19,500 and 35,500 direct and indirect jobs. It is contributing approximately a billion euro per annum in taxation to our economy. Of those jobs, 46% are outside the capital. When people speak about funds, they portray them in a very negative way which is not a true or fair reflection of the facts.

In terms of the need for housing, we know we need to spend, on average, €20 billion per annum to ensure that we construct the number of houses that are needed on an annual basis to ensure we bring house prices down to an affordable level, we increase supply to meet demand and we ensure rents fall to a more affordable level. One of the critical components of that is to ensure that international and private funds provide investment. It may sound as if we are playing to a certain audience but that is an appropriate way to characterise funds.

The Bill represents a significant step in the State's post-crisis normalisation. It acknowledges the substantial work carried out by NAMA and the special liquidators of the IBRC and provides a clear and efficient structure to bring remaining matters to a conclusion and completion. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

National Treasury Management Agency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026: Referral to Select Committee

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Robert Troy): I move:

That the Bill be referred to the Select Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, and Taoiseach pursuant to Standing Orders 103 and 188.

Question put and agreed to.

Criminal Justice (Terrorist Offences) (Amendment) Bill 2025: Report and Final Stages

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): Before we go through the amendments, I want to acknowledge and thank Deputies for their engagement on the Bill on Committee Stage and now on Report Stage. I have noted and considered the issues raised by Deputies on Committee Stage and I look forward to working constructively with the Leas-Cheann Comhairle and Members of the House to ensure this important Bill can be passed.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 1 to 6, inclusive, and 11 to 14, inclusive, are related and will be discussed together.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 1:

In page 3, between lines 13 and 14, to insert the following:

“Amendment of section 3 of Principal Act

2. Section 3 of the Principal Act is amended by the insertion of the following new definitions:

“ ‘crime against humanity’ means any of the acts specified in Article 7 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court;

‘genocide’ means any of the acts specified in Article 6 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court;

‘war crime’ means any of the acts specified in Article 8.2 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court.”.”.

This amendment is necessary as a foundation for later amendments defining the circumstances in which it would be an offence to join, train or recruit for an armed force when that armed force is engaged in a crime against humanity and war crimes. This group of amendments and existing legislation in this area ignores the pressing terrorism crisis of our time, namely the actions of the IDF in Palestine.

Current laws do not prevent people from joining a military organisation engaged in genocide and gross human rights violations. While this now arises in regard to the actions of the IDF, it may in future arise in regard to the armed forces of other states engaged in war crimes which recruit what are in fact mercenaries. The IDF recruits foreign fighters, just as others who are targets of this legislation do. The EU directive dates from a period when ISIS was at its peak and there was a significant problem with the people travelling from Europe to join ISIS.

Sinn Féin's amendments are designed to address citizens of the State travelling or training to participate in genocide and war crimes. They also outlaw recruitment by the armed forces of such a state. Our amendments would also have the effect of preventing the IDF or other armed forces engaged in genocide or war crimes from training with the Irish Defence Forces. It was revealed that IDF military personnel have trained in the Military College for a period of six years. This is something that would not be permitted under Sinn Féin's amendments. Is this something that the Minister would stand over? Would the Government allow this to happen now? I suspect the Minister would not allow this to happen at this moment in time but the Bill is not just about today. It is about the future and future-proofing legislation so that future Governments and whoever sits in the Minister's seat will not be allowed to permit the IDF or any other organisations involved in genocide to train with our military on Irish soil.

Even today, there is footage of the IDF mocking peaceful activists kidnapped in international waters. Today, the IDF is breaking international law. It is being led by Israel's National Security Minister Ben-Gvir, who happily had a birthday last week where his birthday cake had a noose to symbolise that he hopes to be able to hang Palestinian people.

This is absolutely inhumane. He can be seen walking around in the footage waving a flag and mocking detained citizens. Some of them are our citizens who are being put into a corner with their heads bowed to the ground and not allowed to look up. It is absolutely horrific. Last

year, my colleague Chris Andrews was in a similar situation and he has testified how he and other detainees were treated by the IDF.

What is the crime these people are accused of? All they are looking to do is break Israel's horrific blockade and deliver vital aid to Gazans, who desperately need help. I call on the Irish Government to demand the immediate release of all the citizens who are detained and to seek urgent clarification of their whereabouts. We do not know where they are. There are 15 Irish participants, as well as hundreds of other civilians, who have been taken off these boats. What we saw on that footage today is what is happening right now. This adds to what we know the IDF has already engaged in. It has engaged in the arbitrary killing of civilians. Members of the IDF are on record admitting to this. They have shot unarmed and starving civilians who were queueing for food. They were queueing for food because of a man-made famine created by Israel. Members of the IDF have killed many innocent children. Last year, UNICEF estimated that at least 50,000 children have been killed or injured in Gaza. In total, 75,000 Palestinians have been slaughtered by Israel since the bombardment of Gaza began.

Why does Israel continue to break international law? Why does it continue to commit genocide? It is because there are no sanctions and Israel is allowed to get away with it. I do not see the amendments we are tabling today as being any less important than enacting the occupied territories Bill. It is time for the Irish to take decisive action. It is time for the Irish to hold Israel to account because of the daily horror inflicted on the Palestinian people. I ask the Government to support the amendments we have tabled, which basically seek to stop the IDF from being allowed to train on Irish soil and to stop Irish civilians from going abroad and training with the IDF.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I thank Deputy Ward for moving his amendment. As he indicated at the outset, we are dealing with group 1, which comprises amendments Nos. 1 to 6, inclusive, and amendments Nos. 11 to 14, inclusive. As Deputy Ward indicated, they are all in respect of issues associated with crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes. Deputy Ward is being specific about saying these amendments are focused on the IDF. I have to point out, as I did on Committee Stage, that this legislation is about transposing the 2017 terrorist offences directive from the EU into Irish law and the way we are doing that is by updating and amending the (Criminal Justice) Terrorist Offences Act 2005 that has been in place for the past 20 years or so.

Very many of the legitimate concerns Deputy Ward has identified in moving his amendment are dealt with in Irish law and legislation under the International Criminal Court Act 2006. In that legislation, we set out that in Ireland crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide are criminal offences. It is important that the world is aware that in Ireland you can be prosecuted for those crimes. It is also the case in Ireland, because of the Criminal Law Act 1997, that if you aid or abet crimes against humanity, genocide, or war crimes you are committing a criminal offence in Ireland. It is important to emphasise for anyone listening in that in Ireland we have a body of laws that deal with crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes and they are dealt with in our International Criminal Court legislation.

What Deputy Ward is seeking to do, through his amendment, is move into this terrorist offences legislation with similar types of prohibitions. However, I think it is important that we keep a distinction between the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes

and, separately, the crime of terrorist activity. It may be from the point of view of presentation that Deputy Ward wishes, and he is entitled to say this, that war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide are forms of terrorism but legally, in our criminal justice system, it is important we distinguish between both of them.

Looking at the amendments that have been tabled by Deputy Ward, amendment No. 1 provides an interpretation of the three matters: crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes. That is already provided for in the International Criminal Court Act 2006.

Amendments Nos. 2 to 6, inclusive, and amendment No. 8 provide for new terms to be included as part of the definition of "terrorist-linked activity" in the definitions section of the principal Act. These new terms are further defined in expanded definitions to be inserted as proposed amendments Nos. 11 to 14, inclusive. It is appropriate that we are debating all of the amendments together and that I respond to them all together because, combined, they create new terrorist offences within the engaging in terrorist-linked activity offence. The effect is to criminalise as terrorism travel, organising travel, providing training, receiving training and recruitment for the purposes of serving in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes and crimes against humanity or genocide. As I explained on Committee Stage, I understand the intention behind these amendments. I know what their purpose is. The principal Act does exclude, however, the activities of armed forces during an armed conflict and in the exercise of their official duties from being categorised as being terrorist offences. That was a requirement of the underlying original EU measure underpinning the legislation. That same requirement remains within the 2017 EU directive we are transposing here.

I want to emphasise, as I did at the outset, that a commitment to the rule of international law is enshrined in our Constitution and is enshrined in the International Criminal Court Act 2006, where we have expressly stated that genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes are very serious criminal offences. We know that if you are aiding and abetting them, that is a criminal offence as well. This is one of the core principles of Irish law and foreign policy and includes both customary international law and international agreements. The Genocide Convention and the Geneva Convention are international agreements to which Ireland is party and to which we have given effect in our legislation. When we look at the specific offences of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, they derive from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and from being transposed in the 2006 Act. It enables punishment by the Irish courts for breaches of international law that fall within the jurisdiction of that court. Aiding and abetting under the 1997 Act is also a criminal offence and that similarly can be prosecuted.

I note the sincerity with which Deputy Ward puts forward his concern about what is happening in Gaza. I share very many of his concerns. In Ireland, we have repeatedly stated that the behaviour of the IDF is reprehensible and is criminal, and they are committing crimes against humanity. I have to say, however, in terms of the criticism of the Irish Government, no government in Europe has done as much as the Irish Government when it comes to standing up for the Palestinian people. You can see that in terms of the anger that is directed towards the Irish Government by the Israeli Government. There is a reason for that and the reason is because the Irish Government has very much stood against the heinous activities that have been going on within Gaza.

I also want to deal with a final point that Deputy Ward raised, which was the Irish citizens who have been detained in Israel. I, along with the Taoiseach and Tánaiste call for those Irish citizens to be released immediately.

Deputy Mark Ward: The Minister was right in saying at the very start that, right now, I was speaking about the IDF but I also did say that these amendments would stop future situations arising where another country could be inflicting genocide and war crimes on other people. They would stop people from Ireland being recruited into such organisations and training on these lands so it is not just about now with the IDF.

It is about future situations that may arise. If the Minister accepts that Israel is committing genocide, then he must accept that the IDF is the instrument Israel is using to bring about the horrific situation we see in Palestine at the moment. The Minister said that the IDF has committed war crimes. All these amendments are looking for is for the Bill to say that it would be an offence to join, train in or recruit for an armed force when that force is engaged in crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide. That is all these amendments are calling for. I do not think that is too much to ask. I accept that it may be something the Minister would not agree with at this time, but I do not know who is going to be sitting in his seat in five, ten or 15 years' time.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: As I said, it is already an offence. If individuals involved in armed forces are engaged in war crimes or crimes against humanity, there is a consequence to that down the road. In terms of the enforcement of this, all we in Ireland can do is set out in our legislation what we believe should be the appropriate standard of international law applied domestically. We have done that. We criminalised genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Interestingly and importantly, we will also criminalise the crime of aggression. Let us look at what is happening in Ukraine. The purpose of that could be that it could apply in situations like that. When it comes to our status as a country that complies with our international obligations when it comes to wrongdoing, crimes against humanity and war crimes by other states, we comply with that but this is not the instrument in which to insert the Deputy's amendments. For that reason, I must oppose amendment No. 1.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 3, between lines 21 and 22, to insert the following:

" 'organising or facilitating travel for the purpose of serving in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide' shall be construed in accordance with section 4F;".

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 3:

In page 3, between lines 25 and 26, to insert the following:

" 'providing training in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide' shall be construed in accordance with section 4F;"

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 4:

In page 3, between lines 27 and 28, to insert the following:

" 'receiving training in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide' shall be construed in accordance with section 4F;"

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 5:

In page 3, between lines 27 and 28, to insert the following:

" 'recruitment for purpose of serving in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide' shall be construed in accordance with section 4F;"

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 6:

In page 3, between lines 27 and 28, to insert the following:

" 'travel for purpose of serving in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide' shall be construed in accordance with section 4F;"

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendment No. 7 arises out of Committee Stage proceedings. Amendments Nos. 7 and 8 are related and will be discussed together.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 7:

In page 4, to delete lines 3 to 11 and substitute the following:

"(d) by the substitution of—

(i) the following definition for the definition of "terrorist activity":

" 'terrorist activity' means—

(a) an offence specified in Part 1 of Schedule 2 committed with the intention of—

(i) seriously intimidating a population,

(ii) unduly compelling a government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing an act, or

(iii) seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a state or an international organisation,

(b) an act committed outside the State that, if committed in the State, would constitute an offence specified in Part 1 of Schedule 2, done with the intention of—

(i) seriously intimidating a population,

(ii) unduly compelling a government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing an act, or

(iii) seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a state or an international organisation,

or

(c) a threat to commit such an offence, or such an act, made with such an intention;”,

and

(ii) the following definition for the definition of “terrorist-linked activity”:

" 'terrorist-linked activity' means—

(a) an offence specified in Part 2 of Schedule 2 committed with a view to engaging in a terrorist activity,

(b) an act committed—

(i) outside the State that, if committed in the State, would constitute an offence specified in Part 2 of Schedule 2, and

(ii) with a view to engaging in a terrorist activity,

(c) an offence specified in Part 3 of Schedule 2 committed with a view to—

(i) engaging in a terrorist activity (other than a threat to which paragraph (c) of the definition of 'terrorist activity' applies),

(ii) committing an offence under section 21 or 21A of the Act of 1939 or committing an act outside the State that, if committed in the State, would constitute an offence under either such section, or

(iii) travelling for the purpose of terrorism,

(d) an act committed—

(i) outside the State that if committed in the State, would constitute an offence specified in Part 3 of Schedule 2, and

(ii) with a view to—

- (I) engaging in a terrorist activity (other than a threat to which paragraph (c) of the definition of 'terrorist activity' applies),
 - (II) committing an offence under section 21 or 21A of the Act of 1939 or committing an act outside the State that, if committed in the State, would constitute an offence under either such section, or
 - (III) travelling for the purpose of terrorism,
- (e) public provocation to commit a terrorist offence,
 - (f) recruitment for terrorism,
 - (g) providing training for terrorism or receiving training for terrorism,
 - (h) travelling for the purpose of terrorism, or
 - (i) organising or facilitating travel for the purpose of terrorism;" ,".

This is a technical amendment that alters the wording of the definition of terrorist activity and terrorist-linked activity in section 4 of the principal Act. It expands on the definition of these as currently proposed by section 2 of the Bill. The amendment does not substantially change the substance of these definitions in the principal Act or from what was proposed in section 2 but, rather, enhances them in the interest of legal clarity and ensures compliance with the 2017 directive on combating terrorism in respect of the acts required to be codified as terrorist offences.

The key changes to the current proposed section 2, as provided for in this amendment, are, first, the definitions of terrorist activity and terrorist-linked activity now have separate subsections when referring to certain acts committed outside the State. They make clear that the definition is referring to the same act that would constitute offences in the State, notwithstanding that the act occurred outside the State. While the definitions as they currently stand in section 4 of the principal Act provide for this, it was advised by parliamentary counsel that rewording was needed in the interests of clarity and precision.

The amendment also expands the definition of terrorist activity to include making a threat to carry out terrorist acts. This is demonstrated in paragraph (c) of the proposed new definition. Again, this is not a new offence being introduced at this point but, rather, is a drafting technique, moving the reference to threat from where it is currently criminalised in section 6 of the principal Act, which is the general terrorist offence provision. This amendment incorporates it into the definition of terrorist activity in the definitions section of the principal Act. When terrorist activity is then codified as a terrorist offence in section 6(1)(a), the offence of threatening terrorist acts will be covered as part of this same offence provision without having to be referred to separately.

There are technical requirements of paragraph (c) of Article 12 of the 2017 directive on combating terrorism that will be given effect to in this amendment. Paragraph (c) of Article 12 refers to forgery offences required to be codified as terrorism when committed with a view to carrying out certain other terrorist acts. The definition of terrorist-linked activity in the amendment gives effect to this, at paragraph (c), when referring to offences classified in Part 3 of Schedule 2 carried out in certain specified circumstances. Those circumstances needed to be expanded, however, from the current iteration of this definition in the principal Act to cover

committing forgery with a view to travelling for the purpose of terrorism and also to exclude committing forgery with a view to threatening terrorism, as this exclusion was required by the directive.

The remainder of the amendment contains the same elements as were included in section 2 of the Bill as it currently stands and in section 4 of the principal Act, giving partial effect to the requirements of the directive with regard to criminalising as terrorist offences public provocation to commit a terrorist offence, recruitment to terrorism, receiving and providing training for the purpose of terrorism, travel for the purpose of terrorism and organising travel for the purpose of terrorism, all of which are expanded on further in the Act or Bill.

That is what I want to say in respect of amendment No. 7 but since we are discussing amendments Nos. 7 and 8 together, I understand that amendment No. 8 proposed by Deputy Mark Ward is a consequential amendment related to the first group of amendments discussed under group one. For procedural reasons, it was included as part of the second group of amendments but the substantive nature of amendment No. 8 is the same as that of the Deputy's earlier amendments. My comments regarding to the latter are the same.

Deputy Mark Ward: I accept that amendment Nos. 7 and 8 are connected to the amendments I spoke about previously but I will speak on amendment No. 8 and possibly come back in on amendment No. 7. We have to remind ourselves of what we are dealing with and why we cannot allow citizens of our State to serve in the IDF or any other armed force engaged in war crimes. In addition to the destruction of Gaza and the killing of tens of thousands through indiscriminate bombing, members of the IDF have engaged in the shooting of pregnant women and the burning alive of children as they slept in tents. The IDF has blocked aid, food and medicine from getting to a starving population. Its members have raped and sexually assaulted Palestinians, including teens, who have died as a result. This is not disputed. This is documented and justified in Israel. The IDF has targeted healthcare staff, attacked hospitals and ordered healthcare staff to leave patients, including newborn babies, to die in incubators. It has targeted journalists. Nearly 200 journalists have been killed according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Israel will not let international news teams into Gaza.

We have to send a message that Ireland will not tolerate this. Evil triumphs when good men do nothing. We simply cannot do nothing. We cannot be bystanders to genocide and we cannot allow citizens of this State to facilitate genocide. Does the Minister know what we will be doing very soon because good men have done nothing? We will be welcoming former members of the IDF to play a game of football against the Irish team. This is absurd. Can the Minister guarantee that those players who take to the pitch have not taken part in or supported the genocide of the Palestinian people? Can he guarantee that those who travel to Ireland to support Israel have not taken part or supported the genocide of the Palestinian people?

I said to the Minister earlier that if he accepts that Israel has committed genocide, he must accept that the IDF is the instrument Israel is using to commit that genocide.

If this is the case, I do not see how the Minister cannot accept our amendments.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: The Bill we are dealing with is terrorist offences legislation, the primary purpose of which is to protect people in Ireland from terrorist attacks. It is for the

purpose of transposing the 2017 EU directive on updating the laws in respect of terrorism. That arose predominantly because of the attack on the Bataclan theatre and other very significant terrorist attacks that took place in Europe from 2015 onwards. The primary purpose of the legislation, and the reason I am bringing it forward, is to ensure Irish people can be protected from terrorist attacks and that there is co-operation between EU member states to ensure there are not terrorist attacks on the territory of the EU. That is the primary purpose of it.

The Deputy spoke very eloquently about what is happening in Israel but as I said to him on the earlier amendments, we already have in place in Ireland legislation that criminalises crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes. It is provided for in the International Criminal Court Act 2006. We also have crimes for people who are aiding and abetting that. If somebody is aiding and abetting genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, they also are committing a very serious criminal offence. However, for the purpose of this legislation, I must emphasise that it is about the type of terrorist activity that, regrettably, we have seen on this island in the past and we have seen in Europe in the past. The primary focus is trying to protect people in Ireland from such terrorism. By stating that, I am not trying to take away from the points the Deputy has made about what is happening in Gaza or the West Bank. There are legal instruments that can deal with the issue he spoke about, but we are talking about terrorist offences perpetrated and carried out in Ireland and the European Union and the measures that can be put in place to try to ensure they do not occur and that we can combat them.

Deputy Mark Ward: I have some concerns that the definitions in the Minister's amendment are overly expansive. They risk capturing non-terrorist activity and blur distinctions between intent and action, potentially granting disproportionate State power without sufficient safeguarding or clarity. Does the Minister have any concerns that the amendment's vague definitions could risk capturing lawful protest, activism, research or humanitarian work as terrorism by relying on expansive intent tests and extraterritorial reach that exceeds genuine security needs?

Deputy Paul Murphy: I support the Sinn Féin amendment and I have concerns about the Government amendment. I have concerns about the whole Bill, to be honest. I will start on the Sinn Féin stuff, to which the Minister responded by saying this is about real terrorism, it is about brown people or republicans. That is the type of terrorism he is dealing with here, not any of that fine state terrorism we see carried out by the US and Israel. Today, we have video of an Irish citizen being terrorised by Itamar Ben-Gvir, the security minister in Israel. It shows an Irish citizen, a peaceful activist trying to bring humanitarian aid and break the illegal blockade of Gaza, being physically mistreated while Itamar Ben-Gvir gloats about it. However, we are expected to accept that we are not dealing with any of that kind of terrorism here, and we will deal with it somewhere else. Why are there double standards? Why must we accept that the genocide of the Palestinian people and the complete mistreatment of anyone who attempts to stand up for the Palestinian people do not count as terrorism and we do not want to cover that here?

My second point relates to Government amendment No. 7, which seeks the redrafting of the definition of "terrorist activity" to include "an offence specified in Part 1 of Schedule 2 committed with the intention of ... [among other things] unduly compelling a government or

an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing an act". The offences specified include a lot of serious stuff that people would recognise as terrorism but also include criminal damage and endangering traffic. Could the fuel protests have been defined as terrorist activity? They were potentially endangering traffic under the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997. The definition of endangering traffic states "intentionally places or throws any dangerous obstruction upon a railway, road, street, waterway or public place". Would placing a tractor on O'Connell Street or in front of a refinery be counted as endangering traffic? I suspect it would. If we combine endangering traffic, as so defined in the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act, with "unduly compelling a government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing an act", when obviously these protests were designed to call for a cap on fuel prices among other things, can these people be defined as terrorists?

Regarding criminal damage, attempting to get into Shannon Airport and break the US war machine, which is being used to encourage and collaborate with the genocide, is criminal damage, yes, but it is absolutely morally correct to do so. Does that become a terrorist act? That is the problem with this whole Bill in reality.

I know the Government has amendment No. 16, which states the engagement by a person via protest, advocacy or dissent, or strike, lockout or industrial action, shall not, in and of itself, constitute grounds for saying that it is terrorism, but it also leaves open the possibility that a protest can be defined as terrorism. As for non-violent civil disobedience, which includes "endangering traffic" or "criminal damage" that has the purpose of "compelling a government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing an act", I have been on plenty of protests in my life and all of them have had the purpose of compelling a government or international organisation to do or not do something. That is the whole purpose of a protest. Whether it is unduly compelling, I do not know, but it is certainly trying to compel them to do something. It is very dangerous that people could be defined as terrorists in this way.

I am interested in the Minister's response. I assume he will say the fuel protestors would not be defined as terrorists under this legislation. I am interested in how he will say they are not because, on my reading, it seems they can be. That is what is so worrying about this proposal.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I thank Deputy Ward and Deputy Murphy for their contributions. Deputy Ward wondered whether I had any concern that the definition of terrorist activity or terrorist-linked activity could, in some respect, interfere with and criminalise legitimate protest as we know it. No, we are not in a situation where we have a similar type of laws here, nor would I or the Government ever propose similar type of laws here as those which operate under the terrorist Act in the UK. I think it is section 13 of that Act which makes it a criminal offence to wear an emblem or to display an object which would lead to a reasonable apprehension that the person is a member of or supporter of a proscribed organisation. Nothing near that level is contained within this legislation. I am satisfied that the definitions set out here are appropriate and will not cover what we regard as ordinary, legitimate protest.

Deputy Murphy started his contribution by indicating that terrorist activity refers to republicans and the type of terrorism we have in Ireland, and that it does not refer to what is happening in Gaza. Obviously, the Deputy was not here earlier when I emphasised that crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide are already criminal acts under the Irish legal

system. They are criminal acts under the International Criminal Court Act 2006 and, more importantly, anyone aiding or abetting those criminal acts is criminalised by the Criminal Justice Act 1997.

I am entitled to say there is a distinction between the hierarchy of criminal activity. My view is that the top of criminal activity is genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. That is what I would have at the top of the pyramid of criminal activity, but terrorism is separate from that.

The Deputy may want, and is perfectly entitled, to define for the purpose of political narrative what is happening in Gaza as terrorism but for the purpose of our legal system, it is important that we distinguish between terrorist activity and, separately, genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Thank you, Minister.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Deputy Murphy also raised a question as to whether, under the definition that is put forward here in amendment No. 7, the fuel protestors would come within terrorist activity or terrorist-linked activity. The answer to the Deputy's question is "No". If you look at the definition, you obviously have to recognise the serious offences contained within Part 1 of Schedule 2-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Thank you, Minister.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: -----and there is an understanding as to what it, in fact, means.
Amendment put and declared carried.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 8:

In page 4, between lines 6 and 7, to insert the following:

"(f) organising or facilitating travel for the purpose of serving in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide,

(g) providing training in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide,

(h) receiving training in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide,

(i) recruitment for purpose of serving in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide,

(j) travel for purpose of serving in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide,".

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 48; Níl, 76; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon

Bennett, Cathy.	Aird, William.	
Brady, John.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Buckley, Pat.	Boland, Grace.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Brennan, Brian.	
Collins, Michael.	Brennan, Shay.	
Cronin, Réada.	Browne, James.	
Cummins, Jen.	Burke, Colm.	
Daly, Pa.	Butler, Mary.	
Devine, Máire.	Butterly, Paula.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Gannon, Gary.	Cahill, Michael.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Calleary, Dara.	
Gould, Thomas.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Graves, Ann.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Chambers, Jack.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Clendennen, John.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Cooney, Joe.	
Healy, Seamus.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Kelly, Alan.	Cummins, John.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Currie, Emer.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Daly, Martin.	
Lawless, Paul.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Lawlor, George.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Dillon, Alan.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Dooley, Timmy.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Fleming, Sean.	
Nash, Ged.	Foley, Norma.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Geoghegan, James.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Grealish, Noel.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	Heneghan, Barry.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Higgins, Emer.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Keogh, Keira.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Lahart, John.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Lawless, James.	
Quaide, Liam.	Lowry, Michael.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Maxwell, David.	
Sheehan, Conor.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
Stanley, Brian.	McCarthy, Noel.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
Wall, Mark.	McCormack, Tony.	
Ward, Charles.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Ward, Mark.	McGreehan, Erin.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	

	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
	Moynihan, Michael.	
	Moynihan, Shane.	
	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
	Murphy, Michael.	
	Neville, Joe.	
	Nolan, Carol.	
	O'Brien, Darragh.	
	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
	O'Connell, Maeve.	
	O'Connor, James.	
	O'Dea, Willie.	
	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
	O'Donovan, Patrick.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	

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

Amendment declared lost.

6 o'clock

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 9:

In page 4, to delete lines 14 to 29.

There is a need for robust legislation to tackle terrorism and terrorist activity. I know everybody can agree on this. I will hang on for a minute, if that is alright, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle, if people want to leave while we are discussing Palestine and the genocide that goes on there.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Hold on for a moment, Deputy. You can proceed now.

Deputy Mark Ward: This is needed, particularly given the current global climate. However, the vagueness in this Bill is more likely to lead to abuse by the Government to stamp out political protest, political activism and free speech. Intention and the glorification of terrorism are open to interpretation.

We cannot have a vague Bill and I will outline why. A clause in the Bill could criminalise those of us who wish to commemorate past Irish revolutionaries. Will the Minister commemorate the members of the good old IRA, such as De Valera, Lemass and Collins? Were they not considered terrorists of their time by the British establishment and the British Government? The language of glorifying terrorism contained in the Bill is open to interpretation. This is the language of the DUP, which has sought to criminalise anyone who attends commemorations of loved ones killed in the conflict in the North. I make no apology whatsoever when I attend, and I will continue to attend, commemorations of our patriot dead. It could be equally used against those commemorating the 1916 Rising or even wearing an Easter lily as I am at this moment.

As I said previously when the Bill was being discussed, such laws existed in the 1980s. It is probable that putting up in public a poster of Bobby Sands or Nelson Mandela would be construed as glorifying terrorism. In the recent past, we have seen how Mo Chara from the rap group Kneecap was charged with a terrorism offence for waving a flag while performing on stage. There is no greater oxymoron than British Government. Kneecap has been a thorn in the side of the British Government because it represents everything the British establishment hates.

The debate on the Bill takes place against a background where there has been across Europe, Britain and America an increase in the use of similar legislation against legitimate political protest, including in relation to Palestine. We cannot ignore this context. The problem is when we insert this kind of provision in law we do not know how it will be used in future. The Minister's assurances that the provision will not be misused does not give any sense of assurance. When I spoke earlier I said that while he may not use this law against Irish people, a future Minister could do so. We do not know who will be sitting in that chair in five, ten or 20 years down the line. There is clearly an attempt to crack down on freedom of speech rather than terrorist activity. Given the direction that Europe is going, we should not allow a diktat from the EU on this or any other issue that impacts on freedom of speech. The section must be opposed because its provisions are authoritarian, uncalled for and open to abuse.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I thank the Deputy for the amendment. I assure him he can continue to commemorate whatever patriot dead he wishes, now or in years to come, and if this provision is enacted, it will have no impact on what he seeks to do. It is important to point out the type of terrorist activity that is going to be covered by this legislation. Earlier I gave the example of what happened in the Bataclan in 2015. I am sure the Deputy will agree that if somebody had sought to encourage and incite the individuals who carried out that atrocity to do so, those atrocities and the act of the person seeking to incite people to get involved in them should be criminalised.

If we look at the provision contained in this section he is seeking to remove, it only applies in certain circumstances. It has to be with the intention of inciting persons to commit terrorist activity. Nobody is suggesting that by going to a commemoration or remembering patriot dead

that someone is seeking to incite others to commit terrorist activity. As well as this, someone has to distribute or publish messages to the public that incite them, or could reasonably be construed as inciting persons, to commit terrorist activity or glorifies terrorist activity, and it has to give rise to the reasonable apprehension that the commission of terrorist activity could thereby result.

The section as set out is markedly different to the example the Deputy gave a few moments ago. He highlighted how Kneecap was prosecuted in the United Kingdom because of the fact they were wearing emblems that were suggestive of them being supportive of a prescribed organisation. The first thing to point out is that they were acquitted. There is also absolutely no provision in Irish law at present, or that will be introduced by this legislation, that would come anywhere close to what is section 13 of the UK Terrorism Act 2000. That Act, as I said, makes it an offence for somebody to display a logo or to wear an emblem that gives rise to a reasonable apprehension that they are member of, or a supporter of, a prescribed organisation. It is astonishing legislation that certainly does not in any way exist in this jurisdiction nor would any Government seek to put it forward. We are dealing with a completely different situation to what has arisen in the past. I give the Deputy an assurance that the types of issues he is concerned about are not issues that will be covered by the legislation.

As I said earlier, the purpose of the legislation is to give full effect to the 2017 directive. Article 5 of the directive requires that public provocation to commit terrorism be criminalised. As mentioned on previous Stages, the amendment of section 4A of the Act does not create new or separate offence of public provocation by way of glorification nor does it make it unduly vague and expensive. Rather, the amendment clarifies that the scope of the public provocation offence is such that it can include public provocation by way of glorification of terrorism. This clarification stems from the requirement of Article 5 of the directive. The clarification does not change a substantive offence, and provocation by way of glorification is encompassed in the offence as it currently stands. Its explicit reference now in the amendment is an exercise clarity and compliance.

The amendment also reformulates the wording of the offence provision more generally to give clarity to the elements necessary for a prosecution of public provocation. This, in fact, safeguards the offence from abuse and misuse. I will not read section 4A as set out in the principal Act but the revised section 4A, as proposed by the Bill, states:

For the purposes of this Part, a person publicly provokes the commission of a terrorist offence if—

(a) he or she, with the intention of inciting persons to commit a terrorist activity, distributes or publishes, or causes to be distributed or published, by any means (including via the internet) to the public or a section of the public a message—

(i) inciting, or that could reasonably be construed as inciting, persons to commit a terrorist activity, or

(ii) that glorifies (including by praise or celebration) a terrorist activity,

and

(b) such distribution or publication gives rise to the reasonable apprehension that the commission of a terrorist activity could thereby result.

The Office of the Parliamentary Counsel has confirmed the revised text affords greater protection to someone exercising their right to freedom of expression than the current section 4A, which simply refers to the publication of a message. It does not see anything about the nature or content of the message. The only thing that makes the publication of the message criminal under the current section 4A is the intent of the publisher. Proof of this on its own will not be sufficient to secure a conviction under the reframed section 4A.

The proposed section 4A contains two new safeguards that are not in the current version of section 4A. First, the message itself must reasonably constitute an incitement to commit a terrorist act and, second, the publication of the message must give rise to a reasonable apprehension that someone might as a result of such publication commit a terrorist act. The use of a reasonableness test is an objective legal standard used in law to prevent against arbitrary or irrational interpretation, assessing circumstances against a hypothetical reasonable person's response or action.

I assure the Deputy that the concern he has about section 3, which he is seeking to remove, is unfounded. He will not find a situation arising where people who are commemorating patriot dead or attending protests will find themselves being prosecuted on the basis they are trying to incite a terrorist act. However, if there are people who are trying to incite naive impressionable young people to commit terrorist activity and that subsequently happens, as we have seen previously, those people should be held liable for it, as was the case in the Bataclan. We have seen elsewhere in Europe examples of where serious terrorist actions have taken place and the people who have incited them and are behind them deserve to be prosecuted and convicted as much as the individuals who carried out the acts.

Deputy Mark Ward: I will sleep well tonight knowing the Minister will not be coming after me for wearing my Easter lily. I also appreciate his assurance that my future attendance at any commemoration of our patriot dead will not be seen as a terrorist offence. However, he has not given me any assurance that future Ministers sitting in his seat will take the same stance. There is vagueness in the Bill that is open to interpretation. It does not give me any confidence whatsoever that this vagueness will not be interpreted by a different Minister, maybe from a different party, and used in a different way.

We are asking the Minister to delete the section on public provocation to commit terrorist offences because the definition is too vague. It is also subjective and open to abuse by future Ministers. I will continue to wear my lily and commemorate our patriot dead, and I accept the Minister's assurances of that. However, I want to know that future generations of Irish people will be able to do the same thing, and this Bill will not come after them.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: It will not be a function of a future Minister to interpret this section if it becomes part of the law. It will be a matter for An Garda Síochána in the first instance to consider whether or not there has been a breach of this section. It will then be a matter for the DPP to decide whether or not a person deserves to be prosecuted for public provocation to commit a terrorist offence. It will finally be a matter for the court and the jury, if it is on indictment, to interpret and decide whether or not an offence has been committed. The likelihood is that this is a type of offence that will apply in the aftermath of a terrorist offence that has been committed, and where individuals can be identified as having incited individuals to participate in the offence. Similarly, it could be used in circumstances where an

offence has not occurred but where somebody is clearly trying to incite somebody else to commit a terrorist act. It is important to know that if it is in our Statute Book, a whole series of hurdles need to be overcome. It will not be a matter for a Minister for Justice in the future to say he or she thinks a political opponent has breached section 4A of the terrorist Act. It will be a matter for gardaí to investigate, the DPP to make a decision on whether to prosecute, and for the court to determine it. The types of examples the Deputy is concerned about are not of concern to me. I do not see any circumstance in which any form of legitimate commemoration will be subject to this section. What it will cover are circumstances where people have sought to incite impressionable people to commit terrorist activity. If that has happened, as I am sure the Deputy will agree, the people behind it should be held equally liable.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 47; Níl, 78; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Bennett, Cathy.	Aird, William.	
Brady, John.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Buckley, Pat.	Boland, Grace.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Brennan, Brian.	
Collins, Michael.	Brennan, Shay.	
Cronin, Réada.	Browne, James.	
Cummins, Jen.	Burke, Colm.	
Daly, Pa.	Butler, Mary.	
Devine, Máire.	Butterly, Paula.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Gannon, Gary.	Cahill, Michael.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Gould, Thomas.	Calleary, Dara.	
Graves, Ann.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Chambers, Jack.	
Healy, Seamus.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Kelly, Alan.	Clendennen, John.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Cooney, Joe.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Lawless, Paul.	Cummins, John.	
Lawlor, George.	Currie, Emer.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Daly, Martin.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Dillon, Alan.	
Nash, Ged.	Dooley, Timmy.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Fleming, Sean.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Foley, Norma.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Geoghegan, James.	

Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Grealish, Noel.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Quaide, Liam.	Heydon, Martin.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Higgins, Emer.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Keogh, Keira.	
Sheehan, Conor.	Lahart, John.	
Stanley, Brian.	Lawless, James.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	Lowry, Michael.	
Wall, Mark.	Maxwell, David.	
Ward, Charles.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
Ward, Mark.	McCarthy, Noel.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
	McCormack, Tony.	
	McEntee, Helen.	
	McGrath, Séamus.	
	McGreehan, Erin.	
	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
	Moynihan, Michael.	
	Moynihan, Shane.	
	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
	Murphy, Michael.	
	Neville, Joe.	
	Nolan, Carol.	
	O'Brien, Darragh.	
	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
	O'Connell, Maeve.	
	O'Dea, Willie.	
	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
	O'Donovan, Patrick.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghail, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	

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

Amendment declared lost.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 10:

In page 7, to delete line 7 and substitute the following:

“(II) an offence under subparagraph (i) of paragraph (b) of subsection (1) of section 6,”.

This is a technical amendment that refers to the offence of travel for the purpose of terrorism. The precise requirement this amendment is dealing with is the provision for the offence of travelling from the State to another state for the purpose of participating in the activities of a terrorist group. In the Bill as it stands, when providing for this requirement section 4D refers to travelling from the State for the purposes of committing an offence under section 21 or section 21A of the 1939 Act. This is because participation in the activities of a terrorist group is criminalised under Irish law via section 21 or section 21A of the Offences Against the State Act 1939. These make it an offence to be a member of, or provide assistance to, an unlawful organisation. Section 5 of the principal Act designates terrorist groups as unlawful organisations. However, the 1939 Act criminalises those acts only when committed in the State. When they are committed outside the State they are criminalised via section 6(1)(b)(i) of the principal Act. Given the specific requirement to make it an offence to travel outside the State for the purposes of carrying out those acts and, as such, those acts would be committed outside the State, the reference should be travelling for the purposes of committing an offence under section 6(1)(b)(i) of the principal Act, so it is a very technical amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 11:

In page 7, between lines 32 and 33, to insert the following:

“Training for purpose of serving in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide

4F. (1) For the purposes of this Part, training in the armed forces of a state engaged in the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide means intentionally providing instruction or training in the skills of—

(a) making or using, for the purpose of committing, or contributing to, the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide—

(i) firearms or explosives,

(ii) nuclear material,

(iii) biological weapons, chemical weapons or prohibited weapons, or

(iv) such other weapons, or noxious or hazardous substances, that may be used in the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide as the Minister may prescribe,

or

(b) such other techniques or methods for the purpose of committing, or contributing to the commission of, war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide as the Minister may prescribe, knowing or believing that it is likely that the skills provided are intended to be used by a person receiving the instruction or training for the purpose of committing, or contributing to the commission of, war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.

(2) The Minister may, if he or she considers it appropriate to do so, make regulations for the purposes of subsection (1) and he or she shall—

(a) before making such regulations, consult with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Defence, the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána, and such other Minister of the Government as the Minister considers appropriate having regard to the weapons, substances, techniques or methods concerned, and

(b) in making such regulations, have regard to the following:

(i) the capability of the weapon, substance, technique or method concerned to cause the death of or serious bodily injury to persons or substantial material damage to property;

(ii) the capacity of the weapon, substance, technique or method concerned to be used for the purposes of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide and the likelihood of it being so used;

(iii) the extent to which instruction or training—

(I) in the making or use of the weapon or substance concerned, or

(II) in the use of the technique or method concerned,

is required for the making or use, as the case may be, of that weapon, substance, technique or method for the purpose of committing, or contributing to the commission of, a war crime, a crime against humanity or genocide.”.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 12:

In page 7, between lines 32 and 33, to insert the following:

“Recruitment for purpose of serving in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide

4F.For the purposes of this Part, recruitment for purpose of serving in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide means the intentional recruitment of another person to serve in the armed forces of a state which is engaged in, or is reasonably suspected of having engaged in, a war crime, a crime against humanity or genocide.”.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 13:

In page 7, between lines 32 and 33, to insert the following:

“Travel for purpose of serving in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide

4F.For the purposes of this Part, a person travels for the purpose of serving in the armed forces of a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide if he or she travels from the State to a place other than the State for the purpose of participation in the armed forces of another state which is engaged in, or is reasonably suspected of having engaged in, genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes.”.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 14:

In page 7, between lines 32 and 33, to insert the following:

“Organising or facilitating travel for purpose of participation in the armed forces of another state which is engaged in genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes

4F.For the purposes of this Part, a person organises or facilitates travel for the purpose of participation in the armed forces of another state which is engaged in genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes—

(a) if he or she—

(i) does any act—

(I) consisting of the making of an arrangement for the travel by any person to the State from a place other than the State, or

(II) that would facilitate the travel by any person to the State from a place other than the State,

or

(ii) causes any person to do such an act,

knowing that such travel is for a purpose referred to in section 4F,

or

(b) if he or she—

(i) does any act—

(I) consisting of the making of an arrangement for the travel by any person from the State to a place other than the State, or

(II) that would facilitate the travel by any person from the State to a place other than the State,

or

(ii) causes any person to do such an act,

knowing that such travel is for a purpose referred to in section 4F.”.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 15:

In page 7, between lines 32 and 33, to insert the following:

“Amendment of section 5 of Principal Act

6.Section 5 of the Principal Act is amended by—

(a) the insertion of the following subsection:

“(2A) A body corporate that directs the activities of a terrorist group (at any level of its organisational structure) shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction on indictment to a fine.”,

and

(b) the substitution, in subsection (4), of “Subsections (1), (2) and (2A)” for “Subsections (1) and (2)”.”.

This amendment relates to a requirement of Article 18 of the directive and concerns sanctions for legal persons. The term "legal persons" denotes a body corporate such as registered and statutory organisations. Article 17 of the directive requires that legal persons can be found liable for offences under the directive and Article 18 requires that they can be punished by fines. A body corporate is a person under Irish law and thus can be found liable for the same offences as a so-called natural person can. This applies to all the offences provided for in the principal Act and the Bill. One offence that does not currently carry a fine is that of directing a terrorist group, which is criminalised via section 6 of the Offences Against the State (Amendment) Act 1998.

This section makes it an offence to direct an unlawful organisation and section 5 of the principal Act designates terrorist groups as unlawful organisations. However, the 1998 Act only provides for sanction for this offence via imprisonment. It does not provide for fines. An amendment, therefore, was required to provide for this. The amendment provides for the specific offence of directing a terrorist group by a body corporate and provides for a corresponding penalty of a fine to comply with Article 18.

Amendment put and agreed to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendment No. 16 arises out of Committee Stage proceedings.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 16:

In page 7, between lines 32 and 33, to insert the following:

“Amendment of section 6 of Principal Act

7.Section 6 of the Principal Act is amended—

(a) in subsection (1), by—

(i) the substitution of the following subparagraphs for subparagraph (ii) of paragraph (a):

“(ii) attempts to engage in a terrorist activity, other than a terrorist activity consisting of—

(I) a threat referred to in paragraph (c) of the definition of ‘terrorist activity’,

(II) an act that is an offence under section 3 of the Explosive Substances Act 1883 consisting of the unlawful or malicious possession or control of an explosive substance with the intent referred to in paragraph (b) of that section,

(III) an act that is an offence under—

(A) subsection (1) of section 4 of the Explosive Substances Act 1883 consisting of the possession or control of an explosive substance other than for a lawful object,

(B) section 15 of the Firearms Act 1925,

(C) section 26 or 27A of the Firearms Act 1964, or

(D) section 4 of the Chemical Weapons Act 1997,

or

(IV) an act committed outside the State that, if committed in the State, would constitute a terrorist activity to which clause (I), (II) or (III) applies,

or

(iia) attempts to engage in a terrorist-linked activity other than—

(I) public provocation to commit a terrorist offence,

(II) receiving training for terrorism, or

(III) organising or facilitating travel for the purpose of terrorism, or”,

and

(ii) the deletion of subparagraph (iii) of paragraph (a),

(b) the substitution of the following subsection for subsection (5):

“(5) For the purposes of this Act, the engagement by a person in any protest, advocacy or dissent, or in any strike, lockout or other industrial action, shall not of itself constitute grounds for inferring that the person is doing an act with the intention of—

(a) seriously intimidating a population,

(b) unduly compelling a government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing an act, or

(c) seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a state or an international organisation.”,

and

(c) the insertion of the following subsection:

“(10) The Director of Public Prosecutions shall, when considering in which Member State it would be most appropriate for criminal proceedings to be brought against a person to whom subsection (9) applies, take account of the following:

(a) the Member State where the offence was committed,

(b) the nationality or Member State of residence of the person,

(c) the country of origin of the victim of the offence, and

(d) the Member State in which the person was first arrested for the offence.”.”.

This amendment relates to section 6 of the principal Act, which is the main terrorist offence provision. The first group of amendments to this section aims to insert in section 6(1)(a) two new subparagraphs, which will be sections 6(1)(a)(ii) and 6(1)(a)(ia). These amendments stem from the requirements of paragraph 3 of Article 14 of the directive. This makes it an offence to attempt terrorist acts. There are certain terrorist acts that while considered offences themselves, the attempt at such is excluded from being an offence under the directive. Thus, attempting to threaten terrorism, attempting to possess explosive substances or firearms for terrorism, attempting to provoke terrorist activity and attempting to organise or receive training for terrorism are not offences under the directive. Technical legal reasons can preclude the attempt of these actions from being charged as an offence in and of itself. This is down to the fact that in these cases the substantive action that is being attempted can be considered an attempt itself or an otherwise unfinished action in the pursuit of criminal harm. It would be illogical to criminalise attempting to attempt terrorism and a prosecution would, invariably, fail where the action being charged is too far removed from the actual criminal harm.

The amendments, thus, exclude the attempt of these acts from the ambit of the offence of attempting terrorism, as required by the directive. This amendment also deletes section 6(1)(a)(iii) of the principal Act. This relates to the offence of threatening terrorist activity. This does not, however, remove this offence from the principal Act. Rather, the offence will now be provided for via the definition of "terrorist activity" in section 4 of the Act, which was discussed previously. This expands the definition to include the threatening of terrorist acts

and with engaging in terrorist activity, then codified as an offence in section 6(1)(a)(i). This is a structural change to how the offence is drafted.

This amendment also reworks section 6(5) of the principal Act, which clarifies that the engagement by a person "in any protest, advocacy or dissent, or in any strike, lockout or other industrial action" is not alone a sufficient basis for inferring the person is committing an act with terrorist intention. That terrorist intention is defined in the Act as aimed at "seriously intimidating a population", "unduly compelling a Government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing an act" or "seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a state or an international organisation". The amendment does not make any fundamental change to this subsection, but simply reformulates the wording to make it clearer.

It is important to point out that I brought forward the amendment in question on foot of what was stated here in the concerns that individuals expressed. It now expressly provides that for the purposes of this Act, "the engagement by a person in any protest, advocacy or dissent, or in any strike, lockout or other industrial action, shall not of itself constitute grounds for inferring that the person is doing an act with the intention of seriously intimidating a population" or the other tests or definitions for terrorist activity.

The last aspect of this amendment inserts section 6(10) into the principal Act. This stems from the requirement in paragraph 3 of Article 14 of the directive for co-operation between member states when both may have jurisdiction to bring proceedings against an individual. The directive lays down factors that must be considered when arriving at a conclusion as to where the proceedings will take place. This amendment lays down those considerations.

Amendment put and agreed to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 17 and 18 are related and will be discussed together.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 17:

In page 7, to delete lines 35 and 36, and in page 8, to delete lines 1 to 6 and substitute the following:

“(a) in subsection (1), by—

(i) the substitution of “Subject to subsections (2C), (2D), (2E), (2F) and (2G), a person guilty” for “A person guilty”,

(ii) the substitution, in paragraph (d), of “subject to paragraph (f), to imprisonment” for “to imprisonment”,

(iii) the substitution, in paragraph (e), of—

(I) “paragraph (e)” for “paragraph (c)” in subparagraph (i),

(II) “paragraph (f)” for “paragraph (d)” in subparagraph (ii), and

(III) “paragraph (g)” for “paragraph (e)” in subparagraph (iii),”

(iv) the insertion, in paragraph (e), of the following subparagraph:

“(iv) in paragraph (h) or (i) of that definition, on conviction on indictment to a fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years or both.”,

(v) the insertion of the following paragraph:

“(f) in the case of an offence consisting of an act referred to in paragraph (c) of the definition of ‘terrorist activity’ committed by a person who—

(i) when committing that offence, was also committing an offence under section 6 of the Offences Against the State (Amendment) Act 1998, and

(ii) by virtue of the said paragraph (d) would, but for this paragraph, be liable to a maximum term of imprisonment of less than 8 years,

to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 8 years.”,”.

These amendments relate to section 7 of the principal Act, which provides for penalties for terrorist offences. Section 6 of the Bill, as it currently stands, amends section 7 of the principal Act to include penalties for the new offences the Bill introduces. The amendments I am proposing will reframe section 6, with the changes largely driven by technical requirements on foot of the 2017 directive and the cross-referencing of sections the penalty provisions need to link to.

Amendment No. 17 deletes and replaces subsection (a) of section 6 of the Bill. Subparagraphs (i) and (ii) of subsection (a) amend section 7(1) of the principal Act, and their purpose is to signpost later penalty subsections that the earlier provisions in subsection (1) are to now be subject to. Subparagraphs (iii) and (iv) of subsection (a) address numbering changes resulting from prior amendments which change the format and numbering of subcategories within the definition of "terrorist activity" and "terrorist linked activity", as discussed under amendment No. 7. Changes are thus necessitated in section 7 of the principal Act to signpost accurately the updated definition sections that are to be linked to the penalties that section 7 provides for.

The amendment that subparagraph (v) of subsection (a) addresses relates to a requirement in paragraph 3 of Article 15 of the directive that where the offence of threatening terrorism is committed by a person directing a terrorist group, the maximum sentence for the threat offence shall not be less than eight years. This amendment ensures that this requirement is adhered to.

Amendment No. 18 carries on with amendments to section 6 of the Bill. It inserts a subsection (c), which again amends section 7 of the principal Act relating to penalty provision. Subsection (c) results in, first, the insertion of a subsection (2C) into section 7 of the principal Act, which relates to the requirement of Article 18 of the directive, discussed previously under amendment No. 16, that requires that fines be imposed on companies convicted of terrorist offences. Second, it results in the insertion of subsections (2D), (2E), (2F) and (2G) into section 7 of the principal Act to clarify that penalties for the "attempt" and "threat" offences are linked to the same penalty provisions for the substantive offences being attempted or threatened. Third, it replaces the definition of “corresponding offence”, currently in section 7(3) of the principal Act, with a new definition. The change does not substantially alter the meaning, however. The term “corresponding offence”, when referenced in section 7, remains as referring

to those offences listed in Schedule 2 that are linked to the terrorist offence being penalised, with the penalties for those Schedule 2 offences providing the first step to establishing the penalty for the terrorist offence at issue. The updated definition is intended to provide clarity, with more robust language. It is broken down into two categories, one in respect of the "terrorist activity" offence and one respect of the "terrorist linked activity" offence.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 18:

In page 8, line 21, to delete "offence." and substitute the following:

"offence.",

(c) by the insertion of the following subsections:

"(2C) A body corporate guilty of an offence under section 6 shall be liable on conviction on indictment to a fine of such amount as, having regard to the gravity of the offence, the court considers appropriate.

(2D) A person guilty of an offence under subparagraph (ii) of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 6 of attempting to commit the offence under subparagraph (i) of the said paragraph (a) of engaging in a terrorist activity shall be liable on conviction to the penalty to which he or she would be liable if he or she were convicted of the second-mentioned offence.

(2E) A person guilty of an offence under subparagraph (iia) of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 6 of attempting to commit the offence under subparagraph (i) of the said paragraph (a) of engaging in a terrorist-linked activity shall be liable on conviction to the penalty to which he or she would be liable if he or she were convicted of the second-mentioned offence.

(2F) A person guilty of an offence—

(a) under subparagraph (i) of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 6, and

(b) that consists of a threat to commit an offence (in this subsection referred to as the 'threatened offence') referred to in paragraph (c) of the definition of 'terrorist activity' with the intention referred to in that paragraph,

shall be liable on conviction to the penalty to which he or she would be liable if he or she were convicted under the said subparagraph (i) of the threatened offence.

(2G) A person guilty of an offence—

(a) under subparagraph (i) of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 6, and

(b) that consists of a threat to commit an act (in this subsection referred to as the ‘threatened act’) referred to in paragraph (c) of the definition of ‘terrorist activity’ with the intention referred to in that paragraph, shall be liable on conviction to the penalty to which he or she would be liable if he or she were convicted under the said subparagraph (i) of the offence consisting of the threatened act.”,

and

(d) the substitution of the following subsection for subsection (3):

“(3) In this section ‘corresponding offence’ means—

(a) in relation to an offence (in this paragraph referred to as the ‘first-mentioned offence’) under subparagraph (i) of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 6 consisting of engaging in a terrorist activity, the offence (in this paragraph referred to as the ‘second-mentioned offence’) specified in Part 1 of Schedule 2 that consists of the act of which the first-mentioned offence consists, notwithstanding that it is not a component element of the second-mentioned offence that that act be done with the intention specified in the definition of ‘terrorist activity’, and

(b) in relation to an offence (in this paragraph referred to as the ‘first-mentioned offence’) under subparagraph (i) of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 6 consisting of engaging in a terrorist-linked activity, the offence (in this paragraph referred to as the ‘second-mentioned offence’) specified in Part 2 or 3 of Schedule 2 that consists of the act of which the first-mentioned offence consists, notwithstanding that it is not a component element of the second-mentioned offence that that act be done with a view to engaging in a terrorist activity or committing any other offence.”.

Amendment agreed to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 19 and 20 are related and may be discussed together, by agreement.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: I move amendment No. 19:

In page 8, between lines 21 and 22, to insert the following:

“Amendment of section 13 of Principal Act

7. Section 13 of the Principal Act is amended by—

(a) the substitution of the following subsection for subsection (5):

“(5) (a) In proceedings for an offence under subsection (1), it shall not be necessary to prove that—

(i) the funds concerned were wholly or partly used for the purpose of carrying out an act referred to in that subsection (1), or

(ii) the accused was aware of the specific act for which the funds concerned were, or were to be, wholly or partly used.

(b) In proceedings for an offence under subsection (3) to which paragraph (a) of that subsection applies, it shall not be necessary to prove that the funds concerned were wholly or partly used for the benefit or purposes of a terrorist group within the meaning of Part 2.

(c) In proceedings for an offence under subsection (3) to which paragraph (b) of that subsection applies, it shall not be necessary to prove that—

(i) the funds concerned were wholly or partly used for the purpose of carrying out an act referred to in the said paragraph (b), or

(ii) the accused was aware of the specific act for which the funds concerned were, or were to be, wholly or partly used.”,

(b) the substitution, in subsection (6), of “Subsections (1), (2), (3) and (4)” for “Subsections (1) and (2)”,

(c) the substitution, in subsection (7), of “Subsections (1), (2), (3) and (4)” for “Subsections (1) and (2)”,

(d) the insertion of the following subsection:

“(9) Subsections (9) and (10) of section 6 shall apply for the purposes of this section as they apply for the purposes of that section subject to the modification that the reference in the said subsection (9) to an offence under that section shall be construed as a reference to an offence under this section.”.

Amendment No. 19 relates to section 13 of the Principal Act and is intended to give effect to requirements of the 2017 directive. Section 13 of the Act relates to the offence of financing terrorism, which is linked to Article 11 of the directive. Paragraph (2) of Article 11 stipulates that in respect of the offence of financing terrorism, it shall not be necessary that the funds in fact be used to commit terrorist offences nor that the offender know for which specific terrorist offence the funds are to be used. Currently section 13(5) of the principal Act only partially

covers these requirements. Paragraphs (a) to (c) of section 13(5), as proposed to be inserted by this amendment, are more comprehensive, ensuring full compliance. The amendments to section 13(6) are compliance provisions in respect of jurisdictional requirements of the directive in Article 19. Paragraph (1) of Article 19 of the directive requires that member states establish jurisdiction where certain conditions are met; for instance, where the act is committed by an Irish citizen. The amendments to section 13(6) of the principal Act provide for these in respect of the offence of financing terrorism. The amendment to section 13(7) is, again, linked to jurisdictional requirements of the directive and serves to extend jurisdiction in respect of the terrorist financing offence when committed outside the State, beyond those listed in section 13(6), under another set of conditions which are referred to in section 43 of the principal Act. This is to meet the requirements of paragraph (4) of Article 19 of the directive.

Amendment No. 20, which is the final amendment, builds on amendment No. 19 in relation to extraterritorial jurisdiction of the terrorist financing offence. It amends section 43 of the principal Act, which relates to proceedings for offences committed outside the State. The amendment requires that the terrorist financing offences, when committed outside the State, be only proceeded against with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP, as is required for other terrorist offences in the Act. It also gives further effect to paragraph (4) of Article 19 of the directive mentioned previously. That paragraph requires that member states take measures to establish jurisdiction over terrorism offences where the member state refuses to surrender or extradite a person suspected or convicted of such an offence to another member state or to a third country. Section 43 of the principal Act already does this for a range of terrorist offences where the DPP consents. However, the terrorist financing offence was not fully encompassed by this, so this technical amendment No. 20 rectifies that gap.

Deputy Mark Ward: My understanding is that amendment No. 19 aims to make terrorism financing offences easier to prosecute by removing the requirement to prove that funds were actually used for a specific terrorist act or that the accused knew the precise purpose. It broadens liability across subsections and aligns evidential rules with section 6 so that prosecutors need only show that funds were provided in circumstances linked to terrorism, not that they directly financed a particular operation. Does the Minister have any concerns that the amendment lowers evidential thresholds so far that it risks criminalising individuals without proof of intent or use of funds, or that it weakens safeguards against terrorism financing prosecutions?

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I thank Deputy Ward for his question. He accurately sets out the purpose of amendment No. 19 in respect of the offence of financing terrorism. One of the requirements would be that the prosecution would have to show that the funds were used to commit specific terrorist offences. That was something that was too specific. If somebody gives money for the purpose of terrorist activity, it should not be a requirement on the prosecutor or the State to establish that he or she had knowledge that it was going to be used for a specific terrorist act. Somebody could be acquitted of the offence by saying that he or she did not realise it would be used in, to take the earlier example, the Bataclan, and that the funding he or she provided was for another terrorist offence. It is appropriate that we criminalise the funds being used to commit terrorist offences and that there is not a requirement in the legislation for the offender to know that it is for a specific terrorist offence. The amendment is not going to weaken the laws in respect of trying to combat terrorist financing.

In fact, it will probably make it easier to prosecute individuals whose objective has been to finance terrorism. Previously they may have been able to seek to use the defence that they did not seek to fund that specific act and argue that the prosecution must prove that they knew that the funding was for that act. It is important that liability should rest on individuals who know that they are funding terrorist activities, even if they cannot be specifically aware of which terrorist activity is going to be covered by their funding.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 20:

In page 8, between lines 21 and 22, to insert the following:

“Amendment of section 43 of Principal Act

8.Section 43 of the Principal Act is amended—

(a) in subsection (1), by the substitution of “subsection (1), (2), (3) or (4) of section 13” for “13(1) or (2)”, and

(b) in subsection (3), by—

(i) the substitution of “subsection (1), (2), (3) or (4) of section 13” for “13(1) or (2)” where it first occurs,

(ii) the insertion, in clause (I) of subparagraph (i) of paragraph (a), of “or subsection (3) or (4) of section 13” after “section 6(1)”, and

(iii) the insertion, in subparagraph (ii) of paragraph (b), of “or subsection (3) or (4) of section 13” after “section 6 (1)”.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Bill, as amended, received for final consideration.

7 o'clock

Question put: : "That the Bill do now pass."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 82; Níl, 51; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Brady, John.	
Boland, Grace.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brennan, Brian.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Brennan, Shay.	Collins, Michael.	
Browne, James.	Cronin, Réada.	
Burke, Colm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Butler, Mary.	Cummins, Jen.	
Butterly, Paula.	Daly, Pa.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Devine, Máire.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Donnelly, Paul.	

Cahill, Michael.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Calleary, Dara.	Gannon, Gary.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Gould, Thomas.	
Chambers, Jack.	Graves, Ann.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Clendennen, John.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Cooney, Joe.	Healy, Seamus.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Hearne, Rory.	
Cummins, John.	Kelly, Alan.	
Currie, Emer.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Daly, Martin.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Lawless, Paul.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Lawlor, George.	
Dillon, Alan.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Dooley, Timmy.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Feighan, Frankie.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Fleming, Sean.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Foley, Norma.	Nash, Ged.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Geoghegan, James.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Grealish, Noel.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Heneghan, Barry.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Heydon, Martin.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Higgins, Emer.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Keogh, Keira.	Quaide, Liam.	
Lahart, John.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Lawless, James.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Lowry, Michael.	Sheehan, Conor.	
Maxwell, David.	Smith, Duncan.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Stanley, Brian.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	Wall, Mark.	
McCormack, Tony.	Ward, Charles.	
McEntee, Helen.	Ward, Mark.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
McGreehan, Erin.		
Moran, Kevin Boxer.		
Moynihan, Aindrias.		
Moynihan, Michael.		
Moynihan, Shane.		
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.		
Murphy, Michael.		
Neville, Joe.		
Nolan, Carol.		

O'Brien, Darragh.		
O'Callaghan, Jim.		
O'Connell, Maeve.		
O'Connor, James.		
O'Dea, Willie.		
O'Donnell, Kieran.		
O'Donovan, Patrick.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
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 Mark Ward.

Question declared carried.

Health (Amendment) (Home Support Providers) Bill 2025: Report and Final Stages

Deputy Ged Nash: I move amendment No. 1:

In page 7, between lines 25 and 26, to insert the following:

“Insertion of section 12B in Principal Act

8.The Principal Act is amended by the insertion of the following section after section 12A:

“Exchange of public service data

12B.(1) A person specified in subsection (2)—

(a) may, where he or she considers that it is necessary and proportionate for the performance of his or her functions pursuant to this Act, request any other such person to supply him or her with such information as the first-mentioned person may reasonably require for the purposes of those functions,

(b) shall, if her or she receives a request under paragraph (a), as soon as practicable thereafter comply with the request in so far as the information requested is in his or her possession

(c) may, of his or her own volition, disclose to any other such person information the disclosure of which appears to the first-mentioned person to be necessary and proportionate for the performance by the other person of his or her functions pursuant to this Act.

(2) The persons referred to in subsection (1) are:

(a) the Authority;

(b) the Health and Safety Authority;

(c) an inspector for the purposes of the Workplace Relations Act 2015.”.”.

The point of the amendment is essentially that it would provide a basis for the exchange of information between HIQA, the Health and Safety Authority and the Workplace Relation Commission, WRC, inspectors. If, for example, HIQA found that workers employed by a home-support provider were working unlawful hours or perhaps not being paid correctly, or if there were other breaches of their employment rights and other matters that would be outside of HIQA's remit, it would be allowed to and there would be a basis on which it could provide that information to the WRC inspectorate. The Minister of State knows that State agencies across the spectrum routinely share information in relation to compliance on a range of matters, whether they be taxation or social protection matters and so on. We believe this particular proposition merits the Minister of State's consideration.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kieran O'Donnell): I thank Deputy Nash for taking this amendment, which was tabled by Deputy Sherlock. The proposed amendment from Deputy Sherlock seeks to provide HIQA and the Health and Safety Authority inspectorates under the Workplace Relations Act 2015 with the powers to request information relevant to the performance of their functions, as set out under the Health Act 2007, and allows each organisation to share such information where it appears to it to be required for the other body to carry out its functions as set out under the Act. Neither the Health and Safety Authority nor the Workplace Relations Commission have any functions assigned to them under the Act, rendering the proposed provisions-----

Deputy Ged Nash: A Cheann Comhairle, I am finding it difficult to hear.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is a Public Gallery, and we love to have visitors, but the noise comes through and we have to concentrate on what is being said. I ask the Minister of State to continue.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I will go back over my contribution for the sake of clarity. I thank the visitors for their patience and welcome them.

Neither the Health and Safety Authority nor the Workplace Relations Commission have many functions assigned to them under the Act, rendering the proposed provision inoperable for either body.

Additionally, the established legislation for the Workplace Relations Commission, under section 27 of the Workplace Relations Act 2015 and section 72 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, includes powers to request information in respect to their functions. Chief inspectors are provided with similar powers under section 69W inserted in the Bill we are discussing today. It is important that public bodies are able to share information with each other. The Data Sharing and Governance Act 2019 provides a framework for how public bodies can share data and the necessary requirements for doing so. The framework helps to ensure personal data is shared in a consistent manner with full transparency in the way in which data is shared. Consequently, on the basis of what I have just outlined, I will not be accepting the amendment.

An Ceann Comhairle: Does Deputy Nash wish to respond? No.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 9, to delete line 21 and substitute the following:

- “(a) the person provides a home support service to fewer than 2 persons,
- (ab) the person has been granted an exemption by the chief inspector from the requirements or conditions imposed by or under this Act,”.

On Committee Stage we discussed the piece in relation to the number of clients. The current Bill exempts home support providers with fewer than four clients from regulation. The Minister said on Committee Stage it was decided on a proportional basis that people who do one-to-one sessions and might be personal assistants - a profile distinct from those doing just home support - would not be governed by the legislation. We agree with this in principle but the Social Democrats have concerns with the approach taken as unscrupulous employers could create a series of small providers to shirk their regulations. There is also the possibility for the Uberisation of home care providers with introductory agencies matching clients with home carers who are not subject to the regulations and will not be required to have the same standard of training or experience. Our amendment would still allow for single operators to continue working on a one-to-one basis, including personal assistants, and protect the right of an individual wishing to employ their own carer directly. However, if support is provided to more than one client, the amendment would require them to seek an exemption from HIQA. The purpose of this is to ensure the exemption is not taken advantage of by some companies and to prevent a black market of unregulated home care developing. It would also ensure HIQA has a record of the existence of single operators and is alert to any suspicious activity.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: In fairness to Deputy Rice, this comes from a point of view of ensuring there is not any workaround. We have spoken previously in relation to this legislation and the whole point is ensuring we have governance, regulation, fair play and a system that

works for those who work as home carers but also for those who employ them. That is absolutely necessary.

I will also put on the record that, while we welcome that we are dealing with the issue of homecare providers, we need to ensure there is not a long delay in dealing with the issue of personal assistance, PA. I understand that the issue is that it falls between the Department of Health and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality. We need to ensure there is no loophole and that we see movement because we also need to make sure we do not have huge disparity between those who work in homecare and personal assistants. We must ensure we look after them, whether they work with older people or those with disabilities who need extra support.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I thank Deputy Rice for tabling this amendment. Section 69B(2) sets out the circumstances where a homecare support provider can seek an exemption to the requirement to register under the Bill. This ensures there is suitable clarity and transparency about when a person will be exempt from the requirement to register. Section 69B(2)(a) provides that where a person provides a homecare support service to fewer than four people, that person will be exempt from the requirement to register. This exclusion was carefully considered as part of the original general scheme to ensure the regulatory burden placed on providers was proportionate to the size of the service being provided. These small services are typically single operators working on a one-to-one basis with service users. These operators can be considered especially valuable in rural areas. This exemption also seeks to exempt PA services where a service user directly employs a personal assistant. These arrangements allow service users to direct the way in which their services are provided, which upholds the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

International comparisons were also looked at when drafting the exemptions. Wales includes a similar exemption in its version of homecare, which is called domiciliary support services. When I visited Wales, and particularly Cardiff, on St. Patrick's Day, I met the Welsh minister responsible and her officials to discuss this aspect. The Welsh scheme exempts providers who provide support to four or fewer people at any time. The Bill exempts providers who provide support to fewer than four people, which is three or fewer. Northern Ireland, Scotland and England all exempt services where the care and support is provided by a single individual. Based on this proportionality, I cannot accept the amendment.

I know the intent behind it. The legislation will be reviewed two years after it fully comes into operation and we will look at it. However, it was carefully thought about and we looked at international comparisons and at making it proportionate. I am not accepting the amendment, but I note its intent.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: I ask the Minister that this issue be given due consideration in the review because it is important. We need to ensure there are no loopholes, no operators are getting around the regulations and that they are enforced in full. We have a concern about that, so I ask for a commitment that it will be included in the review.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I accept what the Minister said. It is about making sure we do not end up with an anomaly that allows for people to work in an unregulated system. There is

also an absolute requirement to deal with the issue of personal assistants. It is about making sure that happens. All we want is a framework that works so the correct level of homecare and personal assistance can be provided to those who require it. I put a particular emphasis on those with disabilities, because it is sometimes forgotten about.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I thank Deputy Rice for his support for the legislation and assure him that all aspects will be covered in the review.

In response to Deputy Ó Murchú, PA services are under the remit of the Department of children and disability. Our Department has been very open. The other Department has a review ongoing so PA is not included in the legislation at the moment, but we are open going forward in the process, once the other Department has concluded its deliberations.

I thank the Deputies for their contributions.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Bill received for final consideration.

Question proposed: "That the Bill do now pass."

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Will the Ceann Comhairle permit me to make a final comment?

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I thank all the contributors to Second Stage, Committee Stage and Report Stage. This is an important Bill and I thank them all for their contributions. The development of this regulatory framework has been a key priority for the Government and represents an integral part of the ongoing development of the statutory homecare scheme as committed to in the programme for Government. I acknowledge the work of my predecessor in this role, the Minister of State, Deputy Butler, who is in the Chamber with us, and more particularly the great work completed by the officials in the Chamber and their colleagues.

Officials from my Department, together with colleagues in the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, are considering the most appropriate approach to giving effect to the regulations needed to support this legislation. Should amendments be required to deal with this matter, I will bring them forward as the Bill moves through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

I thank Deputies for their contributions. I look forward to working with them in the future on the area of home support and progressing statutory homecare, which was committed to in the programme for Government.

Question put and agreed to.

Central Bank (Amendment) Bill 2025: Instruction to Committee

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Robert Troy): I move:

That Standing Order 194 is modified in accordance with Standing Order 241(2) to provide that it be an instruction to the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure, Public Expenditure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, and Taoiseach in relation to the Central Bank (Amendment) Bill 2025, that the Committee has power to make amendments to the Bill which are outside the scope of the existing subject matter of the Bill in order to make provision for:

- (a) the establishment of a statutory obligation on insurers to disregard a person's medical history, in respect of a diagnosis of cancer, for the purposes of applications for mortgage protection insurance relating to a principal private residence;
- (b) the definition and regulation of the conditions under which such medical history shall be disregarded, including the completion of active cancer treatment and specified periods of remission;
- (c) the provision by applicants of information necessary to demonstrate compliance with such conditions, where requested;
- (d) the specification of a maximum amount of mortgage protection insurance cover to which such disregard shall apply;
- (e) the conferral of functions on the Minister for Finance to review and prescribe such maximum amount, including the making of orders subject to approval by Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann;
- (f) the amendment of the Insurance Act 1936, including the extension of provisions relating to the winding-up of insurers and reinsurers, and the powers of the Central Bank of Ireland in that regard; and
- (g) the amendment of the Insurance Act 1964, including provision in relation to the Insurance Compensation Fund;

and to change the title of the Bill and make other consequential amendments required to take account of the changes above.

I thank the House for the opportunity to discuss the motion to introduce amendments to the Central Bank (Amendment) Bill 2025 on Committee Stage which will ensure that the Bill delivers, in a practical and legally robust manner, the policy objective of providing protections for cancer survivors in accessing mortgage protection insurance cover for their principal private residence. A cancer diagnosis should not define a person's future or stand in the way of owning a home. It should not stand in the way of providing security for oneself or one's family and should not cast a shadow over someone who has already gone through so much.

As Members will be aware, the Central Bank (Amendment) Bill 2025 was originally introduced as a Private Members' Bill by my colleague, Deputy Catherine Ardagh, before I took it on as a Government Bill and sought to provide for a broad statutory right to be forgotten, as it is known, for cancer survivors for certain financial products. That objective has strong support across Government and Opposition benches and is reflected in the programme for Government commitment to legislate in this area.

Following detailed analysis and extensive engagement with stakeholders, including the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, the Central Bank, the Financial Services and Pensions

Ombudsman, Insurance Ireland, the Irish Cancer Society, the Irish Society of Medical Oncologists and the Society of Actuaries in Ireland and engagement with EU counterparts, it became clear that certain aspects of the Bill as published required refinement in order to ensure that the measures are proportionate, operationally effective and compatible with EU law.

It is important to recognise that the Bill builds on the voluntary code of practice introduced by Insurance Ireland in December 2023. An independent review found that the code was broadly effective but also highlighted the limitations of a voluntary approach. These amendments will bring that voluntary model to a framework that provides legal certainty. They will give statutory effect to protections that were previously voluntary, making them enforceable in law and ensuring consistent application across the market.

The amendments will provide for a revised structure to the Bill, including: a new Title, namely the Insurance (Disregard of Certain Medical History and Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026, which more accurately reflects the purpose of the Bill, as well as essential definitional provisions clarifying key terms such as insurer, mortgage protection insurance, applicant and principal private residence and introducing a definition of active cancer treatment to ensure consistency in application.

A significant change is the removal of the proposed amendment to the Central Bank Act 1942. This reflects policy that the Central Bank's role remains focused on prudential supervision and conduct regulation, and that individual consumer complaints in this area are more appropriately addressed by the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman, a body already established to resolve disputes between consumers and financial service providers. While the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman is not mentioned explicitly in the Bill, compliance with the framework is a requirement for insurers.

The amendments also clearly define the scope of the Bill to apply specifically to mortgage protection insurance rather than across all financial services. This targeted approach aligns the Bill with the existing voluntary framework and avoids unintended impacts across the wider insurance and financial services market.

At the core of the amendments is the statutory obligation on insurers to disregard a person's cancer related medical history once the specified conditions are met. These conditions reflect the operation of the voluntary code currently in place, requiring that an individual has completed active cancer treatment and has been in complete remission for a period of five years. This five-year threshold is shorter than the seven-year threshold currently in the voluntary code, reflecting established medical standards and the point at which the risk of recurrence is significantly reduced. I thought it prudent to shorten this timeframe based on the evidence presented to me and the need to give certainty to survivors.

While the measure is often described as a right to be forgotten, the legislative approach is in fact a right to disregard. The amendments will introduce a clear operational framework for insurers to verify, if requested, information necessary to determine eligibility, including confirmation of diagnosis, treatment completion and remission. Insurers can then assess and determine applications accordingly. That history must be disregarded and cannot be used to refuse cover or to increase premiums within the statutory threshold. The original Bill's sponsor, Deputy Ardagh, is aware of and supports this approach.

The Bill also specifies that the disregard obligation will apply up to a defined level of mortgage protection insurance cover, set at €650,000. This represents an increase on the existing voluntary code's threshold of €500,000, which I sought during consultation, and expands access to protection while allowing normal underwriting practices to apply to any portion of cover above that threshold. To ensure the framework remains responsive to market developments over time, the amendments provide for periodic upward review of the threshold. The Minister for Finance will be required to review the threshold in five-year periods, having regard to factors such as residential property prices, and may increase the amount by order, subject to approval by both Houses of the Oireachtas.

The amendments also include standard provisions on the administration of the scheme, including the payment of expenses in accordance with public financial procedures. In addition, and to deliver on action 24 of the Action Plan for Insurance Reform, amendments to the Insurance Act 1936 are also included. These amendments will give the Central Bank of Ireland the power to petition the High Court for the winding up of reinsurance companies.

This will address a gap in the current framework and bring reinsurers into line with other financial services sectors, such as banks, credit unions and investment firms, where the regulator already has appropriate insolvency powers. The proposal also responds directly to the IMF's financial sector assessment program recommendation that weaknesses in the insurer insolvency regime be remedied through legislative change. Also included are amendments to the Insurance Act 1964 to fully implement changes to the Insurance Compensation Fund framework arising from the sixth motor insurance directive. These amendments ensure that captive insurance undertakings, which insure only the risks of their own corporate group, remain outside the scope of new levy requirements relating to crossBorder motor insurance business. This approach is consistent with the existing Insurance Compensation Fund framework, under which captives are excluded from levy requirements for domestic insurance businesses.

Together, these measures ensure that the legislation is both effective in protecting consumers and fully integrated within the broader regulatory framework governing the insurance sector. On 27 April, the Government approved these amendments, and a decision was taken to progress the legislation as a priority measure in order to deliver on a programme for Government commitment. These changes will deliver a balanced, proportionate and effective framework that will provide real benefit to cancer survivors.

I will take the opportunity to thank, in particular, Deputy Catherine Ardagh, who initiated this Bill in the first instance in the Seanad, re-initiated it in the Dáil and enabled me to capture or overtake it to allow me to prioritise it as a Government Bill. We have gone further than what was originally envisaged under the voluntary code. This is good news for cancer survivors. As I said, I want to thank Deputy Ardagh in particular, but all Members of the House who have been very supportive as we have worked our way through this legislation. I look forward to addressing any questions and engaging in further detail on Committee Stage of the Bill, which I understand will be taken next week, should we get approval of the Bill here tonight.

Deputy Máire Devine: Sinn Féin welcomes this Bill. Ensuring the right to be forgotten is essential for people who have overcome cancer. For people who face a diagnosis of that kind, and we all know somebody who has, purchasing a home will not be the first thing on their

minds but shelter and owning your home is so important to recovery and the quicker we realise the difficulties people are facing - the battle with cancer, even when they are on the far side of it, it is an battle to simply be treated like everybody else by the banks and insurance companies, which are the modern gatekeepers of home ownership.

The Government can be assured of Sinn Féin's support for this Bill. In many ways, it is long overdue. In Ireland we saw a voluntary code recently adopted by the insurance industry. Insurance companies can choose whether they adhere to a code in each individual case. The longstanding default of self-regulation has not served us well. That voluntary code only applies to mortgage protection insurance and not to other types of insurance.

That said, the fact we are looking at this policy area raises many more questions. Is after five years of being cancer free a fair threshold to be set for the right to be forgotten? We have to add the difficult years of battling cancer. Only when people are finally cancer-free does the clock start and then they have to wait for five years to apply for mortgages. I do not think that seems right. We need to look hard at that and perhaps the Minister of State will do so on Committee Stage.

I hope the Government will be sincerely open to looking at how we could go further than what is set out in the Bill. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have a long track record of siding with the banks, including allowing them to send up to 100,000 mortgages to vulture funds, many for no reason, and without consent. The families deserve justice there. The banks are allowed to enjoy corporation tax relief while boasting a combined profit of €5 billion last year alone and despite never fully repaying the Irish people for bailing them out. This is an opportunity for the Government to show is it on the side of ordinary people and not the banks. Ordinary people deserve so much more.

Make no mistake, banks and insurance companies do not want this even if they would not say it publicly. If this is to pass, they want it to be as narrow as possible, with the wait time for a fresh start as long as possible. A year after the first all-clear from a doctor should be more than enough. We need to understand that very recently, in the past decade, healthcare treatment and options have been revolutionised, as has the treatment of serious illnesses with the rapid positive results that were always promised. This needs to be taken into account. Survival rates from cancer have quadrupled and it is no longer necessarily the big C scary stuff we thought it was perhaps a decade or so ago. Healthcare has moved on and has been revolutionised so I do think a year being clear from a doctor should be enough.

People need to be able to move on with their lives, especially with lives they felt had been threatened. We have to think about why we are only talking about cancer. There are many serious medical conditions that mean people cannot access mortgages either because the banks will not lend or the insurance companies will not provide the insurance banks require to issue a mortgage. My party colleague Deputy Conway-Walsh was dealing with a case a couple of years ago where a woman who had previously suffered from an eating disorder was denied insurance. She was denied precisely because she was continuing therapy to ensure she did not relapse. She was effectively being punished for doing the right thing, for seeking help and staying healthy and investing in her own health. I believe that eventually, due to the woman bravely speaking out and to political pressure, she was offered cover but nobody should have to go down that route and that is all on an individual, desperate basis, putting your life story out there and begging and pleading for somebody to listen so they will act and give cover.

This leads me to another area. It is not often that lending is the greatest barrier. As I mentioned in the story about the women with the difficulties with an eating disorder, the issue is often accessing the mortgage protection insurance. This is where we need to be careful to ensure the legislation has the intended effect. Not only must people not be denied cover but we also need to ensure they are offered fair and affordable premiums. If someone gets an offer but the monthly cost is extortionate, then the barrier to accessing a mortgage will remain. It is a kind of catch-22. This issue is sometimes kicked around between the banks and the insurance companies; hands off, Mexican stand-off and it is somebody else's problem. The insurance company will say that where they will not insure, there are exemptions under section 126 of the Consumer Credit Act. While banks will say that insurance companies should be providing insurance, people are denied mortgages for not having mortgage protection insurance and are quoted extortionate premiums. Many people do not know that they can argue their case with the bank.

I welcome this legislation and commend my Dublin South Central colleague and former Seanad mate, Deputy Catherine Ardagh, and well done to her for bringing this forward. I commend her on progressing this and ask the Minister of State to have a think about what I have just said.

Deputy Ged Nash: I too direct my plaudits at Deputy Ardagh. This is very much her initiative and something that was well supported along the way by the Irish Cancer Society and other Deputies and Senators across these Houses. It is one of those evenings when we can all say a job has been well done. It shows the utility of this House as well. We try to do it all of the time but it is more explicit on occasions like this when we are reflecting the real, everyday needs of the people who elect us. We do not know ourselves the day on which a diagnosis of cancer will knock on our doors. It does not discriminate. There is not a family in this country that have not been affected. I know that Deputy Ardagh's own family have been affected as well. I have no doubt that experience influenced her commitment to bringing this legislation forward. We always try to be the messengers of the people in this House and time and again in my night on 30 years as a public representative - almost 16 years in the Oireachtas and as a member of local authorities before that - I have come across these cases.

I have worked with insurance brokers in my own constituency of Louth time and again to try to address the issues that are brought to their attention by clients or indeed people who would be more appropriately described as potential clients because until now, there was very little they could do for a client seeking mortgage protection insurance on his or her way to purchasing her or her home. We have all dealt with those cases and they are heart-breaking. This is a very real human issue that is being addressed in this legislation.

I am glad that the Minister of State has more appropriately framed this initiative and his intention in terms of the legislation as a right of disregard rather than a right to be forgotten. That is the appropriate way to describe this. It is fantastic that when this legislation is passed, cancer survivors will no longer be discriminated against in terms of accessing mortgage protection insurance.

We know and the Minister of State referenced the fact that a voluntary code has been in place since 2023. Voluntary codes are all well and good but they often do not always cut it. We often see voluntary codes that are developed on a positive basis through the bona fides of

a regulatory body or a well-established agency but they can often fail those they are designed to support and protect. It is positive that we are inserting this requirement into the primary legislation.

The scope of the intended legislation involves only mortgage protection insurance but could I ask that this matter be looked at in terms of the right to access additional financial products and services, that we keep an open mind on this and that this is regularly reviewed and interrogated because cancer survivors like everybody else are entitled to live a full life and participate fully in the economy of this country and our society? If it is the case that someone cannot access all of the financial services that are available to the broad range of citizens then he or she is not by definition a full actor in every aspect of economic and social life so I ask that this be kept under review. I think it is inevitable that we will be looking to review this. In legislation, more often than not there is at least an in-built review after two to three years in terms of the operation of an element of an Act and we need to be very clear that it has to happen in this case.

Financial service providers are only too capable of undertaking actuarial reviews on services and their client base and so on and I have every confidence that the financial services industry, in its broadest definition, is well capable of ensuring there is extensive access to all financial services for those who have come through cancer diagnosis, who are survivors of cancer and are living healthy lives. The Minister of State knows very well that we need to keep a very clear-eyed view when we come to the operation of the insurance industry and how it operates in this country. It needs to be put on notice that there is a very clear expectation of it that it act in accordance with this legislation. There should be no requirement for the insurance industry to be asking any more of cancer survivors in terms of the information it needs to make a determination on access to mortgage protection product than what is outlined here. We know only too well from our experience that the insurance industry can often go further in its interrogation, if I could describe it as such, of clients and prospective clients. I would ask the Minister of State and the regulator - the Central Bank - to keep a very close eye on how the insurance industry manages this.

Unfortunately, there was a very tight timeframe for us to introduce our proposed amendments on Committee Stage, which we hope and expect will happen next week. This is an important debate but we may not have the opportunity to bring forward the kind of amendments ideally that we would like to on Committee Stage. Given its importance, I ask that we give this legislation sufficient time as well on Report Stage and that the use of the guillotine or at least the excessive use of the guillotine is avoided because we will have views on the kinds of amendments we wish to bring forward and we will need time to do that. In doing so, that would give the people who are targeted by this legislation their full due and the respect they deserve and give this legislation the respect it merits. We need time to fully consider this and propose amendments.

Deputy Michael Collins: I want to speak on behalf of ordinary decent people out there who did the right thing all their lives. They worked hard, saved carefully and tried to put some money aside for their retirement. The problem is what happens when they are struck down with cancer, which is a very serious ailment that can in some cases lead to life-threatening situations. In more cases, it does not and they make a good recovery. There has to be some

leverage there for these people who have gone back to normal life and deserve that understanding of the situation they are in.

There is not much understanding in the financial sector for such people because I have heard from people who were not wealthy investors but rather were farmers, small business owners or working families. They went to financial advisers in good faith and like anyone else, they took reassurance from seeing that these advisers were registered with the Central Bank of Ireland. They believed that meant something. They believed it meant oversight, protection and accountability but when things go wrong, and I have seen this at first hand in my own constituency, the reassurance counts for little. People have lost hundreds of thousands or even millions of euro of their life savings and what are they told? They are told the Central Bank does not deal with the individual complaints and are sent down a long road of process and paperwork while their futures hang in the balance. Meanwhile the very individuals who are responsible can shut down one company, walk away and set up again under a different name still operating, still authorised and still dealing with people's money. This is simply not good enough. What message does that send? It sends the message that there are no real consequences for those who mislead or fail their clients.

We are told compensation schemes exist but they are limited and do not cover the reality of what many people have lost. For someone who has lost his or her pension or savings, €20,000 is not protection; it is an insult. What is the point of Central Bank registration if it offers no real protection when it is needed most? I raised this issue before and people out there listening today will be asking what has changed because from where they stand, nothing has changed. It is time to strengthen accountability, to ensure that individuals and not just companies are held responsible and to fix a system where people can walk away from the damage they have caused and simply start again because at the end of the day, this is not about regulation on paper. It is about real people, real losses, real health issues and real consequences. It is about people I have sat down with and listened to - people who are left devastated and even suicidal. Right now, far too many people are being left to carry the cost alone.

Deputy Catherine Ardagh: I thank the Minister for introducing this legislation. I welcome the opportunity to speak on what will be called the Insurance (Disregard of Certain Medical History and Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026, which many people across Ireland know simply as the "right to be forgotten" legislation. Tonight is a very important night for cancer survivors and their families. This legislation is about fairness, dignity and recognising that somebody who has survived cancer, completed treatment and rebuilt his or her life should not continue to face financial discrimination years later when trying to buy a home and protect his or her family. For too long, cancer survivors faced what many described as a second battle after their treatment has ended. They have already gone through surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, uncertainty and fear. They have fought the hardest battle of their lives yet years later, when they apply for mortgage protection insurance, many are still being treated differently because of their historic cancer diagnosis. It is simply not fair. A cancer diagnosis should not be a lifelong sentence and this legislation remedies that. I am very proud to say that I first introduced this legislation in the Seanad in 2022 alongside the then Senators, Deputy Jerry Buttimer and Paul Gavan of Sinn Féin, with broad cross-party support through the Oireachtas cross-party group on cancer.

8 o'clock

Later in the Dáil, Deputy Erin McGreehan and I introduced the Central Bank (Amendment) Bill during one of the first terms of this Dáil. That is the basis of the legislation that is before us this evening. I want to say very clearly that this Bill does not belong to one individual or one political party; it belongs to a community. There is an old saying that it takes a village. In this case it took a community of survivors, advocates, doctors, lawyers, insurers, civil servants and politicians like the Minister of State to bring this legislation to where it is tonight. Every single person involved played a role in getting it here and many people spent countless hours over several years advocating for this legislation because they genuinely believed cancer survivors deserved better.

I want to acknowledge Professor Mark Lawler and Ciarán Briscoe for their work at the All-Island Cancer Research Institute. I want to acknowledge Adrian O'Higgins BL, who drafted the original legislation and gave enormously of his time and expertise in this process. I particularly want to acknowledge Rachel Morrogh, CEO of the Rape Crisis Centre, who at the time was head of advocacy and public affairs with the Irish Cancer Society and was one of the driving forces behind this legislation.

I also want to acknowledge Steve Dempsey, Nikki Gallagher and former CEO Averil Power, together with the wider Irish Cancer Society team, for their continued engagement and leadership throughout this process. Research from the Irish Cancer Society showed that almost a one quarter of people affected by cancer had difficulty even getting financial quotes after their cancer diagnosis. That research really mattered. It helped expose the scale of the problem and helped drive political momentum behind this legislation.

I also want to thank Commissioner Michael McGrath, the former Minister for Finance, who was supportive in the early years in constructive engagement very early on with the insurance industry.

I want to thank Michael J. McGrath in the Department of Finance, the civil servant who worked extensively on this legislation. I also want to thank Paschal Donohoe, Simon Harris and all the officials in the Department of Finance who worked carefully and diligently on this legislation over a long period of time.

I particularly want to thank the Minister of State, Deputy Robert Troy. Sometimes in politics people begin ideas and sustain ideas, and sometimes you need somebody to bring legislation decisively over the line. To use a sporting analogy, you need somebody to put the ball in the back of the net.

The Minister of State played that role impeccably and I thank him. He engaged seriously with stakeholders, insurers, patient advocates and officials, and he has worked tirelessly and constructively to ensure this legislation progressed to this stage. Hopefully we will see it at committee next week and see it progress before the term ends.

I think it is also important to acknowledge the stakeholder engagement process because it genuinely improved the legislation. At the beginning, stakeholders like Insurance Ireland were understandably very concerned, especially around underwriting, sustainability and risk, but one of the key moments in this process was the review of the voluntary code introduced by Insurance Ireland in late 2023 after our initial Bill in the Seanad. That review demonstrated something very important. It showed that many of the fears surrounding the right to be forgotten were not borne out by the evidence. The independent review found that

approximately 1,300 applications had been made under the voluntary code and approximately 650 people received cover amounting to €96 million in insured loans. Most important, the review found no evidence that anybody who met the code criteria had been refused cover because of their cancer diagnosis.

This evidence changed the conversation. It moved the debate from fear to facts. It demonstrated that fairness for cancer survivors and a sustainable insurance market could co-exist. I think Insurance Ireland, despite negative press, deserves credit for engaging constructively with the Department and the Minister of State throughout that process.

The provisions of the Bill are extremely important and we cannot take our eye off the insurance industry. They have to follow this Bill to the letter of the law. The legislation will place the right to be forgotten on a statutory footing for the first time in Ireland. That is hugely significant because voluntary arrangements do not have the same rights and legal status.

Cancer survivors deserve certainty and the legislation reduces the remission period from seven years to five years. This is important because cancer outcomes and survivorship rates have improved enormously over the years, and our laws must reflect modern medicine and modern realities. The legislation also increases the mortgage protection threshold. This matters enormously given the reality of today's housing market. The legislation also provides for a periodic review linked to CSO residential property price data and stakeholder engagement.

Above the threshold, normal underwriting provisions can still apply but ultimately, this legislation is not about actuarial tables or underwriting models. It is about dignity. It is about recognising that people who survive cancer deserve the opportunity to fully move forward with their lives.

As somebody who has worked extensively on cancer advocacy and healthcare issues, I have spoken to many survivors who felt deeply upset that despite being medically well and discharged from treatment, they still felt financially excluded. Many felt forgotten. Tonight, through this legislation, we are saying clearly that they are not forgotten, that we recognise their recovery, that we support their future and that surviving cancer should not prevent somebody from buying a home, raising a family or planning for the future.

Politics is often criticised, but legislation like this reminds us, as others have said, what politics can achieve when people work together constructively and collaboratively. This Bill is not about ownership. It is about collective effort. It is about survivors, advocates, doctors, lawyers, civil servants, insurers and politicians all coming together in a meaningful way to improve people's lives.

I am proud to have played a small role in initiating this legislation. I am proud of everybody who stayed with it and helped shape it. Most important, I am proud that Ireland is taking this step for cancer survivors and their families. I commend the Minister of State, Deputy Troy, and I commend the Bill to the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Ardagh. That is a modest statement, I am sure. I invite the Minister of State, who has five minutes, to conclude.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Robert Troy): I thank all Deputies who contributed to the debate this evening. I acknowledge patients, survivors and families for whom cancer has impacted their lives. There is not a family in this country that have not been impacted by cancer, my own included. I think of my two siblings who I lost to cancer many years ago. Perhaps that was one of the driving forces that meant I wanted to do something positive when I was in a role to do something that can make a difference to cancer survivors.

Deputy Ardagh has been very generous with her praise of me but I think of everybody who has worked together to bring us to where we are today. It just goes to show that when we do work collectively with key stakeholders and advocacy groups as a collective of people within the Dáil, we can make a very positive difference to people's lives. That is what this Bill is about, making a very positive difference to the lives of cancer survivors, ensuring fairness and ensuring dignity, as Deputy Ardagh has said.

I ask Members of the Opposition not to put in amendments just for the sake of it to say they are trying to do better than what the Government is doing. We arrived at this position after really intensive negotiations and after looking at international best practice. In Italy the term is ten years. In Portugal and Italy the term is ten years, as it is in the Netherlands, Greece, Cyprus, Luxembourg. In Slovenia, Romania and Czechia the term is seven years. The three other countries with terms of five years are France, Belgium and Spain. There is a reason why we are here. Many other countries do not have this at all. We have arrived at this position because it is proportionate and because it will not have unintended consequences for everybody else's policy. Of course we could put it at one year, but what impact would that have on the cost of mortgage protection for every other policy that has been taken out?

Let us keep working in the spirit of what we have arrived at with this Bill today. Many people spoke about the insurance industry, maybe in derogatory terms, and sometimes they deserve the criticism they get in this House but, to their credit and in fairness, they did introduce a voluntary code on the back of the work that then Senators Ardagh, Gavan and Buttimer introduced in the Seanad. The industry did introduce a voluntary code that worked. We are now going further than the voluntary code from seven years to five years. Deputy Ardagh said a sum of €96 million was insured under the voluntary code and that 100% of the people who met the criteria were offered cover at the standard rates. So, credit where credit is due, the insurance companies introduced a voluntary code and it was working. We are going further, with the reduction in the term from seven years to five years and increasing the cost cover from €500,000 to €650,000.

We have worked well together collectively. This is a very positive day, as Deputy Ardagh has said, for cancer survivors.

Sometimes you get up here and you talk about legislation and you wonder what the tangible benefits are for the people whom we are so honoured to represent in this House. There is very tangible benefit for cancer survivors.

I thank Deputy Ardagh for her advocacy and for pushing this to the fore at every opportunity she could. As the Deputy said, one of her first times to speak in the Dáil having been elected was introducing the Private Members' business. The Deputy enabling me to adopt that Bill has enabled us bring it forward to where it is today. I would have liked to have done it faster.

Certainly, there are things we can learn from that. It is a positive news day for cancer survivors. With the support of the House, we will introduce it on Committee Stage next week.

I would ask members of the Opposition to not submit amendments for the sake of it. We have arrived at this. All the key stakeholders welcome this. The Irish Cancer Society welcomes this. I spoke at the All-Island Cancer Research Institute's summit in Croke Park on Tuesday. It welcomes this. Its members asked me to go and speak on this in Brussels to advocate the Irish position internationally. It is the right position. Let us stay united on this when it comes to Committee Stage next week.

Question put and agreed to.

Sanctions against the State of Israel Bill 2025: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a deferred division relating to the Second Reading motion on the Sanctions against the State of Israel Bill 2025. Last Thursday, on the question, "That the Bill be now read a Second Time", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division will now be taken.

Question put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 62; Níl, 77; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Bennett, Cathy.	Aird, William.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Brady, John.	Boland, Grace.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brennan, Brian.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Brennan, Shay.	
Collins, Michael.	Browne, James.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Burke, Colm.	
Cronin, Réada.	Butler, Mary.	
Crowe, Seán.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cummins, Jen.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Daly, Pa.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Devine, Máire.	Cahill, Michael.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Calleary, Dara.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Gannon, Gary.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Clendennen, John.	
Gould, Thomas.	Cooney, Joe.	
Graves, Ann.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Cummins, John.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Currie, Emer.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Daly, Martin.	

Healy, Seamus.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Hearne, Rory.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Heneghan, Barry.	Dillon, Alan.	
Kelly, Alan.	Dooley, Timmy.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Fleming, Sean.	
Lawless, Paul.	Foley, Norma.	
Lawlor, George.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Geoghegan, James.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Grealish, Noel.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Heydon, Martin.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Higgins, Emer.	
Murphy, Paul.	Keogh, Keira.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Lahart, John.	
Nash, Ged.	Lawless, James.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Lowry, Michael.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Maxwell, David.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	McCarthy, Noel.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McCormack, Tony.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	McEntee, Helen.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	McGreehan, Erin.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Quaide, Liam.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Murphy, Michael.	
Sheehan, Conor.	Neville, Joe.	
Smith, Duncan.	Nolan, Carol.	
Stanley, Brian.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Ward, Charles.	O'Connor, James.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	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.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Smith, Brendan.	

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

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

Question declared lost.

Evictions and Rent Hikes: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Eoin Ó Broin on Tuesday, 19 May 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes with extreme concern that:

- 7,062 eviction notices were issued to tenants from January to March this year, up 51 per cent on the same period in 2025;
- at the end of 2025 new rents were up statewide 5 per cent and 4.4 per cent for existing rents; and
- six counties had double digit rent inflation last year including Limerick (12.6 per cent), Monaghan (12.4 per cent), Westmeath (11.5 per cent), Offaly (10.8 per cent), Cavan (10.6 per cent) and Galway (9.9 per cent);

further notes that:

- Statewide new rents were €1,744 per month and existing rents were €1,503 per month at the end of 2025;
- new rents in Dublin were €2,232 per month and existing rents were €1,931 per month at the end of last year;
- the Residential Tenancies Board's dispute caseload increased by 17.6 per cent in the first quarter of this year compared to the same time last year;
- all of this was prior to the Government's new rent regulations which came into effect which will see rents, evictions and disputes increase over the coming year;
- these trends are the direct result of Government policy and will lead to increased displacement of tenants, increased rents and increased homelessness; and
- Government continues to miss their social and affordable housing targets, targets that were too low to begin with, too few private for purchase homes are being built or coming to the market;

resolves that:

— Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael's housing policy continues to make the housing crisis worse and in particular is failing renters;

calls on Government to:

- introduce an emergency ban on rent increases and no-fault evictions;
- cut private rents by putting a full month's rent back into every private renter's pockets;
- oppose rent increases for Council tenants, those in receipt of Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme and cost rental tenants; and
- introduce a radical reset of housing policy as set out by the Housing Commission and to increase and accelerate the delivery of social, affordable and private for purchase homes.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

"notes that:

- the Government is fully committed to tackling high rents and ensuring an increase in the supply of affordable high-quality rental accommodation through continued significant capital investment including cost rental and other means and in a manner that respects the security of tenure for renters by ensuring equity and fairness for landlords and tenants;
- comprehensive reviews of the private rental market and of the Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) rent control system were undertaken in 2024 and 2025, which assessed the rental market generally, the operation of RPZs since their introduction, their impact on the market and relevant stakeholders, the retention of landlords and attracting new investment;
- the review of RPZs by the Housing Agency involved comprehensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including investors, representatives of landlord and tenant advocacy groups, academics and the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB);
- the Residential Tenancies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2026 came into effect on 1st of March, 2026, introducing a new national rent control for all tenancies, which limits rent increases to inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) up to a maximum of 2 per cent, for new build apartments and student-specific accommodation, however, rent increases are capped at the level of inflation CPI only, these changes were introduced to promote greater investment in the rental market and to increase the supply of rental properties, the Act also provides significant improvements in security of tenure for renters;
- while February saw a sharp increase in Notices of Terminations (NoTs), the RTB confirmed that the trend is moderating, with an 18 per cent increase for March compared to March 2025 but a 39 per cent decrease from February 2026;

— to offer greater protection to tenants, rolling six-year tenancies of minimum duration (TMD) apply for new tenancies created for the first time between parties on or after 1st of March, 2026, this means a new tenancy that continues for six months becomes a tenancy of unlimited duration, with rolling six year TMDs, providing real security of tenure for tenants;

— nationally, registered private tenancies rose by 2.44 per cent annually to 246,477 in Q1 2026;

— the number of private landlords rose by 1.3 per cent annually to 105,847, indicating increased participation in the rental market, there is no exodus of landlords from the market, and the rental sector continues to show resilience;

— Delivering Homes, Building Communities 2025-2030, recognises that the rental market is an important element of a well-functioning housing system, it contains a suite of measures to support domestic and international investment in the delivery of new rental properties, in particular the supply of new apartments;

— Ireland is facing a shortage of rental homes, especially apartments, recent reforms to the rental market aim to encourage investment and development, which will encourage the building of new rental apartments, help slow down rent increases and moderate rent levels over time;

— Government has significantly increased resources allocated to the RTB to meet the demands of a modern rental sector;

— further Government measures introduced to support renters include the increase in the tax credit for renters under Budget 2025 to a maximum of €1,000 for each renter in a household, Budget 2026 extends the Rent Tax Credit, which was due to expire at the end of 2025, for a further three years, to the end of 2028; and

— the increase in the thresholds for access to Cost Rental homes, which was increased from €53k net to €66k net in Dublin and €59k outside Dublin, in July 2023;

acknowledges that increased supply is key to meeting demand and moderating the pent-up pressures in the private rental sector and welcomes that:

— there has been an unprecedented level of delivery of new-build social homes, with 2025 representing the largest number of new build social homes constructed since the foundation of the State;

— the new housing plan Delivering Homes, Building Communities 2025-2030, is focussed on putting in place the conditions to enable delivery of a minimum of 300,000 new homes;

— the plan includes a commitment to deliver 72,000 social homes and provide 90,000 affordable supports to help people secure a home of their own;

— it seeks to significantly accelerate delivery of new homes by focusing on activating land and creating the optimal environment to encourage housing activity, including regulatory reform, tax incentives and the largest ever capital investment

in the history of the State, with €275 billion invested in infrastructure over ten years through the National Development Plan;

— to accelerate future supply, Budget 2026 included a suite of taxation measures aimed at stimulating the supply of new apartments including a reduced Value-Added Tax rate and an enhanced Corporation Tax deduction for apartment construction costs;

— the revised National Planning Framework, published in April 2025, is a major step forward in this regard, and will help increase capacity and accelerate home building across the country; and

— the delivery of 300,000 homes by 2030 will however require an estimated €20 billion in development finance each year, a significant portion of which will need to come from investment by the private sector to support home ownership and a well-functioning private rental market;

recognises that considerable progress has been made, including:

— almost 149,000 new homes have been delivered over the past five years, this compares with 83,267 in the previous five-year period and just 29,217 in the five years before that;

— a total of 36,284 new dwellings were completed in 2025, an increase of 20 per cent year on year;

— the unprecedented level of investment Government has committed will bring about a very significant scale up in the delivery of housing over the coming years, address the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities, making buying and renting homes more affordable and support the development of villages, town and cities across the country; and

— the delivery of 300,000 homes by 2030 will however require an estimated €20 billion in development finance each year, a significant portion of which will need to come from investment by the private sector to support home ownership and a well-functioning private rental market; and

agrees that continued implementation of Delivering Homes, Building Communities 2025-2030, represents the most appropriate response to deal with the housing challenges which Ireland is now facing."

- (Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Deputy John Cummins)

An Ceann Comhairle: I will now deal with the deferred division relating to the ministerial amendment to the motion regarding evictions and rent hikes. Yesterday, on the question, "That the amendment to the motion be agreed to", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must now be taken.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 77; Níl, 61; Staon, 0.
--

Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Boland, Grace.	Brady, John.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brennan, Brian.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brennan, Shay.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Browne, James.	Collins, Michael.	
Burke, Colm.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butler, Mary.	Cronin, Réada.	
Butterly, Paula.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cummins, Jen.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Daly, Pa.	
Cahill, Michael.	Devine, Máire.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Calleary, Dara.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Currie, Emer.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Daly, Martin.	Healy, Seamus.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Hearne, Rory.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Lawless, Paul.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawlor, George.	
Foley, Norma.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Grealish, Noel.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Heneghan, Barry.	Murphy, Paul.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Higgins, Emer.	Nash, Ged.	
Keogh, Keira.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lahart, John.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lawless, James.	Nolan, Carol.	
Lowry, Michael.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McEntee, Helen.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	

McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
McGreehan, Erin.	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.	
Neville, Joe.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Connor, James.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
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.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

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

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 77; Níl, 61; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Boland, Grace.	Brady, John.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brennan, Brian.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brennan, Shay.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Browne, James.	Collins, Michael.	
Burke, Colm.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butler, Mary.	Cronin, Réada.	

Butterly, Paula.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cummins, Jen.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Daly, Pa.	
Cahill, Michael.	Devine, Máire.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Calleary, Dara.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Currie, Emer.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Daly, Martin.	Healy, Seamus.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Hearne, Rory.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Lawless, Paul.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawlor, George.	
Foley, Norma.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Grealish, Noel.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Heneghan, Barry.	Murphy, Paul.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Higgins, Emer.	Nash, Ged.	
Keogh, Keira.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lahart, John.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lawless, James.	Nolan, Carol.	
Lowry, Michael.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McEntee, Helen.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
McGreehan, Erin.	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.	
Neville, Joe.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Tóibín, Peadar.	

O'Callaghan, Jim.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Connor, James.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
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.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

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

Question declared carried.

Defence and Neutrality: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Brian Stanley on Wednesday, 20 May 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- Irish Neutrality has been central to the sovereignty and independence of the State, that it was first enunciated by Theobald Wolfe Tone and upheld by successive generations;
- despite being a small country, our neutrality has enabled Ireland to play a positive role in international affairs;
- the Defence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 1960 encompassed neutrality and the requirement known as the "Triple Lock" which means that deployment of Defence Force overseas requires the authorisation of the United Nations (UN), Government and the Dáil;
- the Triple Lock is central to the policy of neutrality;
- the failure of the first referendums to have the Nice and Lisbon Treaties passed was due to concerns by the electorate on neutrality;

- to assuage those concerns, the Triple Lock and Neutrality were enshrined in solemn National Declarations that were attached to both treaties;
- the two treaties were only endorsed by the electorate in second referendums due to these solemn national declarations and guarantees included in them;
- any move by Government to overturn these commitments without a referendum would be a denial of democracy;
- successive opinion polls have demonstrated that the majority of the electorate want our policy of neutrality retained;
- being neutral does not in any way inhibit increasing the capacity and capabilities of the Defence Forces; and
- currently there is no upper limit on the number of Defence Force personnel that can be deployed for the purpose of overseas humanitarian issues;

calls on the Government to:

- uphold the policy of Neutrality and the Triple Lock as set out in the Defence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 1960 and the solemn national declarations attached to the Nice and Lisbon Treaties;
- recognise that these commitments regarding the Triple Lock and Neutrality can only be changed or amended by a majority of the electorate in a referendum;
- recognise that the triple lock and neutrality are intrinsically linked;
- strengthen the States policy of Neutrality by bringing forward a referendum to enshrine neutrality in the constitution;
- work with other neutral and non-aligned countries to reform and re-establish the primacy of the UN as the forum to uphold international law and for resolving international disputes and conflicts;
- abide by the principal of multilateralism and not allow the State to become part of any regional military alliance; and
- halt plans to progress the Defence (Amendment) Bill 2025 and the provisions in it to abolish the Triple Lock and Neutrality.

The following amendment No. 1 was moved by the Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor:

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

"notes that:

- the Government reiterates Ireland's longstanding policy of military neutrality;
- Ireland's policy of military neutrality is characterised by non-membership of military alliances, or common or mutual defence arrangements and this policy choice has been practised by successive Governments since the Second World War;

- the Government reaffirms its commitment to this policy and reiterates that it has no plans to either join a military alliance or enter into a mutual defence arrangement;
- in light of the above commitment, the Government does not believe a national referendum on enshrining neutrality into the Irish Constitution is necessary; and
- amending the Triple Lock legislation in relation to the deployment of our Defence Forces to peacekeeping missions will have no impact on this policy of military neutrality, and that no other European Union Member State, including other neutral Member States, allow permanent Security Council members to bind their hands in the way that the Triple Lock effectively does for Ireland;

recognises:

- Ireland's long-standing policy of military neutrality, and our strong tradition of participation in international peace support and crisis management operations over many decades;
- that members of Ireland's Defence Forces continue to contribute bravely to peacekeeping and crisis management efforts, particularly in the Middle East, as well as elsewhere in the world;
- that the multilateral system remains our strongest protection and the State's most important security asset;
- that Ireland's contributions to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and work for human rights and development, and our efforts to promote disarmament and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, are internationally renowned;
- nevertheless, as a highly globalised country, Ireland cannot rely on our geographic isolation for our security, nor isolate ourselves from world events; and
- the importance of parliamentary safeguards and national oversight in ensuring Irish military deployments are in line with our policy of military neutrality, and that they are decided solely by the elected sovereign representatives of the people of Ireland; and

acknowledges that:

- the Government is committed to supporting the global multilateral system, to vocally defend international law, particularly international humanitarian law, and human rights;
- in common with other partners in Europe, Ireland finds itself in an increasingly contested, dynamic and volatile international security environment, marked by violence and conflict in our immediate neighbourhood, including Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, and conflicts in the Middle East and Africa;
- Ireland, therefore, should not find itself unable to respond to peace support and crisis management operations that align with the United Nations (UN) Charter and International Law, due to a veto by permanent member(s) of the UN Security Council; and
- this legislation will remove the power of UN Security Council permanent members to veto our national sovereign decisions regarding our participation in an International

Force and will also allow for the deployment of Defence Forces personnel overseas in other overseas roles such as the crisis management evacuation of Irish citizens."

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1 to amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after "notes that:" and substitute the following:

- Ireland's policy of military neutrality, our strong reputation of international diplomacy, and our tradition of peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance abroad;
- the importance of public, democratic consultation in shaping Ireland's future defence policy;
- the importance of safeguards, protections and oversight in ensuring Irish military deployments are in line with our policy of military neutrality; and
- the Government plans to remove the current Triple Lock mechanism and raise the number of troops that can be deployed without Dáil oversight to 50;

acknowledges:

- that the Triple Lock mechanism requires (i) Government approval, (ii) Dáil approval, and (iii) a United Nations (UN) mandate through the General Assembly or Security Council for the deployment of more than 12 Irish Defence Forces personnel overseas;
- that the Triple Lock mechanism was introduced to protect our military neutrality during the adoption of the Nice and Lisbon Treaties; and
- that the UN mandate has played a significant role in shaping Ireland's approach to international military engagement and cooperation;

calls on the Government to:

- recognise that the Triple Lock and neutrality are intrinsically linked;
- uphold the policy of neutrality and the Triple Lock as set out in the Defence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 1960 and the solemn national declarations attached to the Nice and Lisbon Treaties;
- abide by the principal of multilateralism and not allow the State to become part of any regional military alliance;
- hold a national plebiscite, to take place before any legislation to amend the Triple Lock mechanism is brought before the Dáil, to allow the Irish people to express their view on whether a United Nations mandate should remain a requirement for Ireland to deploy peacekeeping troops overseas;
- ensure that the plebiscite presents a balanced and informed choice, reflecting the role of the Triple Lock mechanism in Ireland's approach to international deployments to date, the considerations around its impact on peacekeeping operations in the future, and any scope for the removal of the Triple Lock mechanism to result in potential non-neutral military deployment; and

— commit to respecting the outcome of the plebiscite and ensuring that any subsequent policy decisions reflect the will of the people while upholding Ireland's commitment to military neutrality, multilateralism, and international cooperation."

- (Deputy Sinéad Gibney)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with the deferred division on Deputy Sinéad Gibney's amendment to the Government amendment to the motion regarding defence and neutrality. On Wednesday, 20 May 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the amendment be made", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment to amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 61; Níl, 76; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Bennett, Cathy.	Aird, William.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Brady, John.	Boland, Grace.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brennan, Brian.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Brennan, Shay.	
Collins, Michael.	Browne, James.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Burke, Colm.	
Cronin, Réada.	Butler, Mary.	
Crowe, Seán.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cummins, Jen.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Daly, Pa.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Devine, Máire.	Cahill, Michael.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Calleary, Dara.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Gannon, Gary.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Clendennen, John.	
Gould, Thomas.	Cooney, Joe.	
Graves, Ann.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Cummins, John.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Currie, Emer.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Daly, Martin.	
Healy, Seamus.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Hearne, Rory.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Kelly, Alan.	Dillon, Alan.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Dooley, Timmy.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Lawless, Paul.	Fleming, Sean.	
Lawlor, George.	Foley, Norma.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Geoghegan, James.	

McGuinness, Conor D.	Grealish, Noel.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Heydon, Martin.	
Murphy, Paul.	Higgins, Emer.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Keogh, Keira.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Lahart, John.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Lawless, James.	
Nolan, Carol.	Lowry, Michael.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Maxwell, David.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	McCarthy, Noel.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	McCormack, Tony.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	McEntee, Helen.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	McGreehan, Erin.	
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.	Neville, Joe.	
Stanley, Brian.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Ward, Charles.	O'Connor, James.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Donovan, Patrick.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghail, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

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

Amendment to amendment declared lost.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 76; Níl, 62; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Boland, Grace.	Brady, John.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brennan, Brian.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brennan, Shay.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Browne, James.	Collins, Michael.	
Burke, Colm.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butler, Mary.	Cronin, Réada.	
Butterly, Paula.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cummins, Jen.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Daly, Pa.	
Cahill, Michael.	Devine, Máire.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Calleary, Dara.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Currie, Emer.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Daly, Martin.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawless, Paul.	
Foley, Norma.	Lawlor, George.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Grealish, Noel.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Higgins, Emer.	Murphy, Paul.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lahart, John.	Nash, Ged.	
Lawless, James.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lowry, Michael.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Maxwell, David.	Nolan, Carol.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	

McEntee, Helen.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Murphy, Michael.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Neville, Joe.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Connor, James.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Donovan, Patrick.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Brian Stanley and Seamus Healy.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 76; Níl, 62; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Boland, Grace.	Brady, John.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brennan, Brian.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brennan, Shay.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Browne, James.	Collins, Michael.	
Burke, Colm.	Coppinger, Ruth.	

Butler, Mary.	Cronin, Réada.	
Butterly, Paula.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cummins, Jen.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Daly, Pa.	
Cahill, Michael.	Devine, Máire.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Calleary, Dara.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Currie, Emer.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Daly, Martin.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawless, Paul.	
Foley, Norma.	Lawlor, George.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Grealish, Noel.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Higgins, Emer.	Murphy, Paul.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lahart, John.	Nash, Ged.	
Lawless, James.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lowry, Michael.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Maxwell, David.	Nolan, Carol.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Murphy, Michael.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Neville, Joe.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Smith, Duncan.	

O'Callaghan, Jim.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Connor, James.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Donovan, Patrick.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghail, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Brian Stanley and Seamus Healy.

Question declared carried.

The Dáil adjourned at 8.53 p.m. until 8.47 a.m. on Thursday, 21 May 2026.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 8.53 p.m. go dtí 8.47 a.m., Déardaoin, an 21 Bealtaine 2026.