

Vol. 1091
No. 4



Wednesday,
30 September
2026

DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—Neamhcheartaithe
(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters	472
Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate	473
Motor Fuels	473
Health Services	476
Special Educational Needs	479
Health Services	482
Windfall Tax on the Excess Profits of Energy Companies: Motion [Private Members]	486
Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions	517
Ceisteanna ó na Comhailtá Eile - Other Members' Questions	527
Ceisteanna ar Pholasáí nó ar Reachtaíocht - Questions on Policy or Legislation	531
Migration and Citizenship: Statements	541
Industrial Development (Amendment) and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2026: Report Stage	580
Visit of Moldovan Delegation	588
Industrial Development (Amendment) and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2026: Report Stage (Resumed) and Final Stage	588
Council of the European Union Decision: Motions	600
Electricity Regulation (Climate Action and Connection to Distribution and Transmission Systems) Bill 2025: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]	606
Public Transport and Fare Increases: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]	608
Windfall Tax on the Excess Profits of Energy Companies: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]	615

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 30 Meán Fómhair 2026

Wednesday, 30 September 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 Michael Cahill - To discuss the need to bring the Ring of Kerry road up to an acceptable and safe standard.

Deputy Barry Ward - To discuss incentivising the use of HVO fuel to support achieving climate emission targets.

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin - To discuss ongoing issues surrounding the Bus Éireann school bus transport system.

Deputy Robert O'Donoghue - To discuss the opening of the new special school in Balbriggan.

Deputy Duncan Smith - To discuss the need for an investigation into the loss of the remains or partial remains of unidentified bodies.

Deputy Joe Neville - To discuss progress of the three-school campus project in Celbridge.

Deputies Mattie McGrath and Michael Murphy - To discuss the ongoing crisis in ophthalmology services in south Tipperary.

Deputy Thomas Gould - To discuss the closure of Sarsfield Court dementia unit.

Deputy Gary Gannon - To discuss the development of intergenerational community hubs.

Deputy Louis O'Hara - To discuss the ongoing recruitment freeze of newly qualified healthcare workers in County Galway.

Deputy Jen Cummins - To discuss counselling and mental health supports in primary schools.

Deputy Colm Burke - To discuss making the shingles vaccination free of charge for immunocompromised patients and those over 65.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny - To discuss the delay in response to parliamentary questions regarding assessment of need waiting lists.

Deputy Donna McGettigan - To discuss the need for a 24-7 sexual assault treatment unit in the HSE midwest region.

The matters raised by Deputies Barry Ward, Thomas Gould, Robert O'Donoghue, Mattie McGrath and Michael Murphy, and Michael Cahill have been selected for discussion.

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Motor Fuels

Deputy Barry Ward: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire Stáit as ucht teacht isteach chun an cheist seo a fhreagairt. HVO is hydrotreated vegetable oil. Essentially, it is a substitute for diesel. The interesting thing about HVO is that it does not require engine modifications or new infrastructure. People who wish to use it as a substitute for diesel do not need to spend money on changing their engines or modifying systems in order to use it. What is even more interesting is that it can achieve a 90% reduction in carbon emissions when it is utilised and it emits far less carbon monoxide, nitrous oxides and soot generally compared to diesel. As a fuel it is incredibly advantageous to us at a time when we are trying to cut emissions. We know that transport is particularly targeted for emissions cuts. Although it has decreased emissions in the past year by 1.8%, the sector is about 8% behind where it is supposed to be.

As we talk about climate emissions and climate targets, and we talk about trying to put in place systems to help us meet these targets, this is a key tool. It will not do it on its own but it is a key way in which we can do it. The difficulty is that we have no incentive for people to use HVO instead of diesel. There is not nearly enough information out there for people using diesel cars to allow them to understand that HVO is there as an alternative. I know Government policy relates to EVs and the infrastructure that goes with them, and I support the proliferation of electric vehicles as they are a hugely important part of our climate solution, this will take time. We have seen a ramp up in the purchase of electric vehicles and this is very welcome but this is the here and now.

This issue goes across a number of Departments, including transport, energy and finance. In the week that is in it, next week there will be a real opportunity for us to incentivise HVO as a fuel for all cars. What can be done? HVO is subject to VAT and the same mineral oil tax as diesel and other fuels. VAT is obviously something that cannot be modified or changed in relation to one product or another subject to the VAT directive of the European Union, so I understand it is not something the Government can tinker with. However, the mineral oil tax is something that can be changed. We can change the liability in relation to HVO in mineral oil tax and the extent to which it is liable. This is something we are permitted to do under European law and it is not restricted by the VAT directive.

There is a key tool at the Government's disposal now. We can incentivise the use of HVO. We can incentivise for people a fuel that does not require them to change their engines or require new infrastructure, and which would reduce carbon emissions by 19% and reduce harmful emissions from carbon monoxide and the soot that comes out of diesel engines. To my mind this is an obvious thing to do and I do not understand why we have never done it. This is not the first time I have raised it here. There is an incentive to do it from the point of view of the State because we want to reduce emissions. There is also a situation whereby very few people are using HVO. There would not be a massive revenue impact from it if we were to incentivise it.

We are now in the context of a fuel crisis. We are aware we cannot control the wholesale price of fuel in this country because of wars in Iran, in the Middle East and in Ukraine. We understand the crisis is there. We came back at the end of August to vote to ensure the reduction in the excise on fuel continued because we know we have to safeguard it. We are talking about doing this and reducing the carbon tax but here is an intensively positive carbon measure that we can incentivise through the budget next week to reduce the liability for people using HVO, and to do so in tandem with a campaign to show people who are driving diesel cars. We recognise the reality that diesel cars are necessary but that there is an alternative there for them that is better for all of us.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Catherine Ardagh): I thank Deputy Ward for raising this matter in the House today. The Government recognises the environmental benefits of incentivising the uptake of transition fuels such as HVO in place of heavier pollutants such as auto diesel. While HVO has a part to play in the here and now, Ireland must, nevertheless, move to more sustainable methods of transport in the medium to long term.

In relation to private transport the Government remains committed to incentivising the uptake of more electric vehicles, something which Deputy Ward also welcomed, on the road in place of internal combustion engines. This must remain the ambition. In the first half of this year electric vehicles were the leading individual fuel type for new car registrations. That being said, the Government understands the transition to decarbonise Ireland's existing vehicle fleet will take some time.

As Deputy Ward may know, the mineral oil tax treatment of biofuels, including HVO, already financially incentivises biofuels over fossil fuels such as diesel. Biofuels produced from biomass qualify for a full relief from the carbon tax, thus incentivising the uptake of more sustainable and renewable fuels. In the case of blended fuels the biofuel relief applies to the biofuel portion. The rate of the carbon tax relief for biofuels such as HVO used in place of auto diesel is around 23 cent per litre on a VAT inclusive basis. This, it must be acknowledged, is already a significant relief. As biofuels are relieved of the carbon component of mineral oil tax, they are not impacted by annual carbon tax increases. As a result, the mineral oil tax rate differential between biofuels and fossil fuels will continue to widen as the ten-year carbon tax trajectory up to 2030 is implemented, thus incentivising further uptake of biofuels.

Furthermore, the renewable transport fuels obligation scheme under the remit of the Minister for Transport obliges suppliers of mineral oil to ensure that a percentage of the motor

fuel they place on the market in Ireland is produced from renewable resources. The target by 2030 is to deliver a 20% biodiesel mix, which will help to significantly reduce emissions.

The programme for Government also committed to examining the taxation of HVO used for commercial freight to support sustainable transport solutions and decarbonisation of road freight and commercial coaches with fuels such as HVO, hydrogen and biomethane. Work on these commitments is ongoing, including the examination in this year's and last year's tax strategy papers published by the Department of Finance.

However, it must be pointed out that the availability of renewable transport fuels, including HVO, will remain constrained given the current global product production capacity, the need for sustainable feedstock and increasing demand from various sectors to use renewable fuels in the decarbonisation journey. While tax levers can support policy measures, it is important to acknowledge that there is a limit to the role they can play in terms of price leverage.

The price of HVO is dependent on many factors. However, I assure the Deputy that the Government is conscious of the programme for Government commitment and it will continue to examine the potential to increase existing supports for HVO in recognition of the positive role it can play in our decarbonisation journey, as he set out.

Deputy Barry Ward: I thank the Minister of State. I acknowledge what she has said. I note what she said about the commitment in the programme for Government to examine taxation in relation to HVO. I agree with her in relation to EVs, and I welcome that EVs were the more sold vehicles in 2025. I presume, and hope, that this will be even more the case in 2026.

In relation to carbon tax, I acknowledge what the Minister of State said regarding it not applying to biofuels, as is appropriate. The notion that this is the only incentive that we are really willing to countenance to encourage people to use HVO is, I think, shortsighted. This is particularly the case if we are going to be talking in the budget next week about reducing carbon tax generally to alleviate the burden on individuals and households. If that is the case, then we will be eradicating the incentive that is there to use HVO. When we have HVO as a fuel that emits less carbon, 90% less carbon, and reduces harmful gases like nitrous oxides and carbon monoxide, as well as soot, there is so much behind the idea that we should incentivise the use of HVO.

I do not think it is enough to say, then, that the incentive will be the widening gap over time, as the carbon tax increases, between ordinary, standard auto diesel and biofuels or mixes with HVO. We can take positive action now. We can reduce the mineral oil taxation when it comes to biofuels, particularly in the case of HVO. We know that is something that will directly impact our attempt to meet our climate objectives in terms of reducing emissions and to encourage people to use HVO, which is a much better and sustainable fuel and one we can somewhat control in a way we cannot control the imported petrochemical products that come from the Gulf and other parts of the world.

An obvious track is available to us next week. If we actually take the step of saying that HVO is something that people should be using, it will benefit everyone. It will benefit the State, the environment and the individual citizen. We have an opportunity next week to do that. It will be a real missed opportunity if we do not, and it does not make sense if we do not do so.

Deputy Catherine Ardagh: I thank the Deputy for his further comments. As mentioned, the tax treatment of 100% HVO used in place of diesel is already incentivised through the tax system. On a VAT-inclusive basis, 23% less excise duty is charged on 100% HVO fuel when compared with auto diesel. The renewable transport fuel policy also sets out a pathway for the achievement of the climate action plan biofuel targets and EU renewable energy directive targets for an increased share of renewable energy in transport. This is achieved through the renewable transport fuel obligation, RTFO, which obliges mineral oil suppliers to ensure that a percentage of the motor fuel they place on the market in Ireland is produced from renewable sources.

Sustainable renewable transport fuels, such as HVO, provide immediate climate mitigation benefits, as the Deputy outlined, utilising the existing vehicle fleet. They will, therefore, continue to play an important transitional role in the decarbonisation of transport in the coming years as the shifts to electrification and further increases in public transport and active travel are fully realised.

I note that a study on the hierarchy of the use of HVO across transport and other sectors has recently been finalised by the Minister for Transport. The report addresses the most efficient use of HVO relative to available renewable energy and zero-emission alternatives across all transport modes, as well as HVO use in non-transport sectors. The report produced a hierarchy of use of HVO, which aligns with several existing policies and measures, including the sustainable aviation fuel task force report, the road haulage strategy, the renewable transport fuel policy, the ports policy and the design of the renewable heating obligation. This will also inform ongoing policy for renewable energy in transport.

Ultimately, HVO is a commodity traded on the open market, the price of which is susceptible to global market supply-and-demand factors like crude oil, and there is only so much the tax system can do to incentivise its use. The Government, though, has acted to ease the burden of recent increases in fuel prices, as we saw last April.

Health Services

Deputy Thomas Gould: Can the Minister of State imagine a person's husband or partner being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in their late 50s, then having to search for a nursing home with an Alzheimer's-specific dementia unit when they are 65, and just when they have settled into their new home, they are being evicted? Can the Minister of State imagine that? Can he imagine a person whose mother had passed away over the summer then being told their father has to find a new home after eight years of living in the Sarsfield Court dementia-specific unit? This is a unit where the patients are loved and cared for by the staff and their families do not want to see them moved from it.

A man in his 80s contacted me. His wife is in the Sarsfield Court dementia unit. He lives not far from it, and he walks to it or gets a spin from his neighbours, brilliant neighbours, who bring him there. He goes there four or five times a week now. If his wife is evicted from Sarsfield Court on 10 or 12 October, he might not be able to visit her that often. He might only be able to go once or two times a week. This is the love of his life. Margaret is her name. She worked in Sarsfield Court for 20 years, and when she went in there as a patient, the nurses and

staff brought her in with the love of friends. It was like a family. Her husband, Eddie, tells a beautiful story about when they were together. They are 50 years married this year and 54 years together, and now Margaret is facing eviction. This is the love of Eddie's life and at a time when she needs him, he is trying to stand up for her because he believes that to move her and the other seven or eight patients out of Sarsfield Court is wrong.

Can the Minister of State explain to me why the Government is closing the Sarsfield Court dementia unit? The reality for people who have family members there is that not one of them wants to see their family members moved. Sarsfield Court has about 99 acres of green fields and trees. This is a beautiful setting. I know the Minister of State is going to tell me the mental health unit is being moved down from the second floor because those patients do not have access to the outside area but that is the HSE's fault. There is another unit very close to it in Sarsfield Court. You could puck a sliotar to it. It is unit five. If a small bit of investment was put into it, the mental health patients could go in there and the dementia patients could stay in their home.

This is their home. Moving these patients is an insult to their families. It is an insult to people who have worked all their lives and now they are suffering from Alzheimer's disease and dementia, which is an absolutely horrible disease. The State, the Minister of State and his Government are evicting people from their homes. How can the Minister of State stand over it? I plead with him today to stop the closure of Sarsfield Court dementia unit in Glanmire. I could fill that unit today.

The Minister of State will know that I have also raised the issue of Heather House, where a new unit is to be opened with 17 beds. What is the point of closing 16 beds in Glanmire to open 17 in St. Mary's? We need more beds for people with dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Since 1954, Sarsfield Court has been a hospital. That is as long as I have been alive.

Slowly but surely, the Government and the HSE have taken the decision to wind it down. I am looking for answers as to why.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kieran O'Donnell): I thank Deputy Gould for raising this important matter. As he is aware, unit 1 in St. Stephen's Hospital in Glanmire, County Cork, is a designated centre for older people registered by HIQA. Eight residents are residing in the dementia-specific unit. Unit 1 is the only older persons' residential facility on the grounds of St. Stephen's campus because all other operational units on the site are being utilised to deliver a range of services under the registration of the Mental Health Commission.

HSE south has advised me it has taken a decision to deregister unit 1 as an older persons' residential facility with HIQA, with a view to re-registering the unit with the Mental Health Commission to better co-ordinate the mental health services on site because they will now come under the registration of the Mental Health Commission. The Deputy spoke about his constituents. I fully appreciate this is a difficult time for residents of unit 1 and their families. The HSE has advised me that all eight residents in unit 1 will be transferred to residential care facilities deemed to meet their particular care needs, preferences and choices. Furthermore, all residents will also transfer to the new accommodation in a phased and planned manner.

This will be done very much in consultation with the residents and their families. Nothing will happen until they are satisfied with the move. The HSE has advised me that it is engaged in a comprehensive process of engagement, consultation and planning with residents, family and staff, which commenced on 28 July. Once all residents and their families have had an opportunity to look at alternative accommodation options and a full assessment of each resident's individual care needs has taken place, the HSE will commence transferring residents to their new homes in a safe and respectful manner.

The HSE expects that the eight residents will transfer to older persons' residential facilities in the Cork city and east Cork area. Significant works have taken place in recent years to provide additional places for older people in the south west, allowing HSE South West to provide the best possible care for older people in high-quality environments. These include the new state-of-the-art 50-bed Midleton community nursing unit, which opened recently, and the 105 beds in St. Finbarr's community nursing unit in Cork city, which is expected to open in quarter 4 and will include 30 new dementia-specific beds. This is in addition to what the Deputy has already referenced.

A new 17-bed dementia-specific unit in Heather House in Gurranabraher in Cork city has recently been registered with HIQA and is expected to open in quarter 4 of 2026. It is something I have taken a personal interest in. I want to see it opened. I agree with the Deputy that we need additional dementia-specific beds. Seventeen will come on stream in Heather House and another 30 will be available in the new unit in St. Finbarr's in Cork city, which is scheduled to open in quarter 4.

The opening of new community nursing units is an absolute priority for me, the Department of Health and the HSE. I am absolutely committed, along with the Department and the HSE, to ensure that the care needs, preferences and choices of the constituents the Deputy represents are fully respected. I hope their transfer to new state-of-the-art residential facilities happens in a phased, safe and considered manner with the full consent of all residents and in line with the wishes of their families.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I want to be clear about what the Minister of State said. He said that nothing will happen until the families are satisfied and the situation has been worked through. I have met the families privately and there has been a public meeting. The families do not want their loved ones to be moved out of the unit. They fear for the health of their loved ones if they are moved. They were given a list of places in Cork and Kerry where they were advised to take their loved ones. Why would someone leave a place where they are safe, looked after and minded? It is not just a bed. The dementia unit is specifically for dementia patients and is their home.

The Minister of State and HSE have not answered my questions. Why are dementia beds being closed when there is a dementia bed crisis across the State, but especially in Cork? Will the Minister of State give me one reason that is happening? Families are looking for answers from him, but no one will give them answers. They do not want their loved ones to be moved. There is talk about being moved and transferred and care needs. We know their care needs are being met in Sarsfield Court. Why would patients be moved when they are being looked after?

There are eight empty beds in Sarsfield Cork right now where eight people with dementia could be cared for by staff. People love the staff there. The Minister of State said nothing is

going to happen until the families are happy. They are not patients; they are residents. This is their home. I ask for a commitment from the Minister of State to keep the unit open. Will he explain why he and his Government are closing dementia beds? The families cannot explain it. Will he explain how this affects the rights of these citizens as human beings? They are being evicted. It is completely wrong.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Once again, I thank Deputy Gould for raising this important matter. I appreciate it is a difficult time for the residents and their families. As already stated, HSE South West has advised me it has taken the decision to deregister the dementia-specific unit for older persons in St. Stephen's campus hospital, with a view to re-registering the unit with the Mental Health Commission. I reiterate that the HSE is engaged in a comprehensive process of engagement, consultation and planning with residents, family and staff to arrange alternative accommodation for all eight residents residing in unit 1.

Residents and their families continue to engage with the general manager with responsibility for unit 1. The general manager remains available to meet any resident or family member to address any queries they may have. As I said, I assure the Deputy, the residents and their families that the HSE will only commence the transfer of residents to their new homes in a safe and respectful manner once all residents and families have had an opportunity to look at alternative accommodation and a full assessment of each resident's individual care needs has taken place.

The transfer of residents will depend on the assessed care needs of each resident and their choice and preferences. I welcome the assurance from the HSE that it expects the current residents in the south-west area to be transferred to older persons' residential facilities in east Cork and Cork city. A new 50-bed unit has opened in the community nursing unit in Midleton. There will be 30 dementia-specific beds and a new community nursing unit is expected to open in St. Finbarr's. Moreover, a new 17-bed dementia-specific unit, Heather House, in Gurranabraher in Cork city has recently been registered and is expected to open in quarter 4. Once again, I reiterate that the HSE, the Department and I are absolutely committed to ensuring that all eight residents can be moved to a new home of their choosing in a safe and timely manner.

Special Educational Needs

Deputy Robert O'Donoghue: I want to raise an urgent and deeply concerning issue regarding the opening of a new special school in Balbriggan and the 18 children who have been allocated places there. Parents were given the news to a fanfare of local government and Oireachtas Members tripping over themselves back in April to be the first ones to announce on social media that the school would open in the 2026-27 academic year. Because applications had been made, places were allocated and families made decisions based on the information they were given at the time.

The parents I have spoken to have said securing special school places for children with additional needs has been hugely important to them. Families have waited and hoped for these places and when their child was finally offered a place, parents understandably believed that the arrangements were in place for their child to attend. In this case, however, that confidence

has been completely undermined by a serious failure in communication. Throughout the summer, parents repeatedly sought updates. They were told that a meeting would take place in early August and that information about the opening arrangements would be provided, but no clarification came.

Towards the end of August, families were told to keep their children in their existing education placements. At that stage, however, it was too late. Instead, families were left believing the children were about to transition into their new school, only to discover at the last minute that this would not happen as expected.

If families had been clearly advised at the beginning of the summer that they needed to retain their child's existing school place as a contingency, they would have made those arrangements. They have also been offered home tuition, which my office has done its best to try to find but, unfortunately, that is also completely full. We are now talking about 18 children with additional needs who have already faced weeks without appropriate education provision and now could be facing into months of this. That is not a minor administrative inconvenience.

For a child with additional needs, school provides more than just a classroom education. It provides structure, routine, communication opportunities, social interaction, special support and a sense of security. When that is suddenly removed, there can be serious consequences. One family described their child as crying themselves to sleep, has asked through his communication device for his old school friends and has watched his siblings go off to school in the morning while he stays at home. His mother told me she feels completely lost in trying to advocate for her son. Since being out of school, that child has experienced increased distress, severe meltdowns, difficulties with sleep and regression in toileting skills that had taken huge time and effort to establish. That is the real-life impact of this situation.

It is important to recognise parents cannot simply recreate a special needs school environment in their home. Many of these parents are already providing huge levels of care. They are being asked to manage children whose routines and supports have been disrupted while trying to care for other children and maintain their own family responsibilities. I promised my constituents I would ask the Minister of State to confirm an opening date for the school.

When will these children be able to take up the places they have been allocated? Parents should not be left in limbo and expected to simply manage the consequences themselves. If a child were absent from education for weeks without proper explanation or arrangement, questions would be rightly asked. It is then equally reasonable for parents to ask who is accountable when their child is left without appropriate education provision because of a failure in planning or communication.

Will the Minister of State urgently provide a clear response to these families and a firm timeline for the opening of the school? These 18 children have waited long enough. They deserve their education, their routine, their friendships and the specialist support they need.

Deputy Catherine Ardagh: I thank the Deputy for bringing forward this very important Topical Issue today on behalf of the parents and children involved.

This Government is committed to the provision of additional special places for children with special educational needs. Budget 2026 has already provided funding for over 400 new special

classes and at least 400 new special school places for the 2026-27 school year. It was intended this would create almost 3,000 new special education placements for 2026. This would be in addition to placements created due to the natural movement of students, such as those transitioning from primary to post-primary or those completing school.

In April 2026, the Government agreed to additional funding for the provision of special education services for children across the country. This money will fund special education teachers, SETs, additional SNAs, increased capitation, access to school transport for children in special education settings and start-up grants for schools opening new special classes and inclusive special classes. The year 2026 represents the largest ever expansion of specialist education in the history of the State. Through the combined efforts of the Department and the NCSE, 587 new special classes have been sanctioned for the 2026-27 school year, including 70 inclusive special classes. This represents an increase of over 40% in the number of special classes being provided in 2026.

The earlier sanctioning of new classes provides clarity for parents and allows schools more time for the planning and establishment of new special classes. The vast majority of new special classes being announced are being provided in available school accommodation which is being reconfigured as a special class. In total, over 4,300 special classes will be operating in mainstream schools next year, an increase of 130% since 2020. In County Dublin, 845 special classes are now in operation providing capacity for 5,070 students. This includes 140 new special classes for the 2026-27 school year. In April 2026, the Minister, Deputy Naughton, and Minister of State, Deputy Moynihan, announced the establishment of four new special schools, including the Deputy's school in Balbriggan.

Dedicated working groups including the Department, the NCSE and relevant patron bodies continue to meet to support the establishment of the new special schools, which include a dedicated group for the school in Balbriggan. Offers of places have been made, as the Deputy pointed out, and new principals, teachers and SNAs are being recruited. It is intended that these new schools will open later in term 1 of this school year. The NCSE continues to advise parents at local level on developments. These bring to 20 the number of new special schools established in recent years.

As the Deputy is aware, an earlier notification deadline was introduced this year to support forward planning and to earlier equip the NCSE with local information as to what students would be leaving school, transitioning to post-primary specialist places or those seeking specialist placement or entering the education system for the first time. This information is critical when examining where provision needs to be placed to meet demand. The attentions of the NCSE and the Department have now turned to the 2027-28 school year and forward planning is already under way. The Minister of State, Deputy Moynihan, continues to meet the NCSE and senior Department officials each week to monitor the progress being made in providing planning for the 2027-28 school year.

I want to speak to the parents now. We have seen a 130% increase in school places since 2020, but that does not sit well for a parent or child who does not have a school place. I want to let them know the Minister of State, Deputy Moynihan, is doing everything he can to work with the Department and the NCSE to ensure no child is left without a school place. I acknowledge the angst those parents and children are going through in having their education

disrupted like this, but I will make sure I speak directly to the Minister of State on this matter. I again thank the Deputy for raising it today.

Deputy Robert O'Donoghue: I thank the Minister of State. Unlike some others here, I acknowledge more funding has been put into special schools and education this year. Budget 2026 has expanded service provision within the sector. However, I also know we are coming from such a low baseline that we have a lot to make up for. I know Minister of State, Deputy Moynihan, is doing his best - I have no argument there - but we saw the documentary this week with Alison Field having to go through 19 different special schools to find a place for her son. Some funding has been used to educate students in cupboards so funding must be used for quality education, which I am sure the Minister of State is doing his best to do, rather than piecemeal to give ourselves a pat on the back.

I previously suggested to the Minister of State that we could use the AIM model for children with additional needs transferring from early years into primary school, so we know the numbers we are dealing with. That should be seriously looked at, with this school in particular. I know from having been a councillor that expectations need to be managed so that scenarios that have played out with the announcement of this school and the miscommunications do not repeat themselves. The old adage, "If you cannot be best, be first", cannot be used, particularly when dealing with vulnerable students.

Deputy Catherine Ardagh: I thank the Deputy again. I outlined all the work the Minister of State, Deputy Moynihan, is doing. It is important to remember the vast majority of students with a special educational need are supported to attend a school, most of them in mainstream with a cohort attending special schools.

I once again acknowledge the parents. It is very important we bring issues like this to the House. I will make sure the Minister of State, Deputy Moynihan, is aware of this school and that the NCSE reaches out to those parents again. I think the Deputy's main message today was the miscommunication from the Department and that has to be addressed. I will make sure I bring that back to the Minister of State.

Health Services

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Is the Minister of State taking the next item?

Deputy Catherine Ardagh: I am taking the fifth Topical Issue proposed by Deputy Cahill.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): The next one is to the Minister for Health. We will wait for the Minister of State.

Deputy Michael Murphy: I am sharing this Topical Issue with Deputy McGrath about the crisis in community ophthalmology in south Tipperary. I have raised this repeatedly in the Chamber in other Topical Issue Matter debates and numerous parliamentary questions. This follows the planned retirement of Dr. Hillary, the community ophthalmologist working out of

south Tipperary in August 2024. For reasons unknown to me, three recruitment campaigns have failed to recruit a new community ophthalmologist consultant. In the meantime, there are more than 2,300, I think, on the waiting list in south Tipperary. It may surprise the Minister of State to hear that 1,500 of those are children under the age of four, some waiting as far back as 2021. He can appreciate it is very difficult for me as a Teachta Dála representing south Tipperary when parents contact my constituency office - what do I tell them? I am sure as a parent himself the Minister of State will agree that when it comes to ophthalmology, early intervention is crucial. We were promised blitz clinics and a collaboration with the eye and ear hospital in Dublin. There is no evidence any of those initiatives have commenced. I am looking for an update on recruitment as well. We need that multidisciplinary team at the earliest opportunity so that the 2,300 on the waiting list can be dealt with as soon as possible.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for choosing this Topical Issue. It is an important issue. Deputy Murphy put the figures on the record. I will do it again. Some 2,300 people are waiting, 1,500 of whom are children. It is an appalling vista two years on from Dr. Hillary's retirement, who was an exceptionally wonderful practitioner. She gave a year's notice she was leaving so this has been going on for three years. Why is the HSE so incapable of filling this position? We are told Waterford is now holding extra clinics to accommodate south Tipperary patients but this is not happening. Delays in identifying and treating eye conditions can and will lead to long-term eye problems. That is scientifically and medically proven. They have to be treated before the age of seven, which is a vital cut-off.

Why can we not have private fully qualified eye specialists do these tests on young children, to be reimbursed by the HSE? Clinics call to schools. A school in my area was called to recently. An initial screening is done and they are referred on but then they cannot get a test so they have to go private, which costs €50 minimum and then €300 to €500 for glasses. Will the Minister of State commit to ensuring children who require glasses, following private assessment, can still access HSE funding? It is a simple solution. I think it suits the HSE not have this position filled. It is appalling. The system works in other parts of the country. Surely it is in the interests of our children - mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí. It is very basic that our children have a right to have their eyesight checked and treated if necessary. There is a roadmap by which it could be paid for until we get a permanent position or even a temporary one. Something is very wrong if after three recruitment campaigns the Government cannot seem to recruit a person, or does it want to?

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I thank Deputies McGrath and Murphy for the opportunity to address the House today on an issue that I know has had an ongoing impact on many patients in south Tipperary. I am taking this Topical Issue on behalf of the Minister for Health, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, who I know is committed to reducing waiting lists for both adults and children across all our services be they provided in acute hospitals or in the community.

It is important to highlight that the HSE provides free optical services to preschool and national school children referred through child health and school health examinations as having sight problems. These services continue until a child reaches 16 years of age. The community ophthalmic services scheme allows medical card holders and their dependent children aged 12 and over to access eye care from contracted ophthalmologists, optometrists or dispensing opticians.

In relation to the Deputies' specific question, the HSE has confirmed that the community ophthalmic physician post in south Tipperary became vacant in October 2024 following a retirement which they both referenced. In 2025, this post was regraded to a consultant in medical ophthalmology to align with the HSE's national clinical programme for ophthalmology. This clinical programme for ophthalmology developed a model of care to realign eye care services from hospital settings to the community. The HSE has been developing multidisciplinary integrated eye care teams in accordance with this model of care. These teams facilitate assessment, diagnoses and treatment, enabling most patients to be seen in their own locality. The service provided by the previous community ophthalmic physician for south Tipperary operated across HSE south east community services with clinics in both Clonmel Community Care Centre and Cashel Medical Centre.

Since the vacancy arose in October 2024, the HSE has maintained a sustained focus on securing a permanent consultant ophthalmologist for south Tipperary. The post has been advertised on three occasions to date and recruitment efforts remain active. The position is currently being advertised nationally and internationally including through specialist Irish and UK ophthalmology publications. The HSE continues to pursue all available recruitment opportunities to attract suitably qualified candidates and restore permanent service provision to the south east.

Recognising the importance of maintaining access to care while permanent recruitment efforts continue, the HSE south east community service has worked closely with University Hospital Waterford to put interim service arrangements in place. All parents of children were notified of the temporary pause to the service and were offered appointments in University Hospital Waterford. The HSE has also explored other options to ensure service continuity, such as the use of external providers to increase capacity, overtime of existing HSE staff and the possibility of weekend blitz clinics at University Hospital Waterford. Funding has been secured to support delivery of the clinic and engagement with additional staff from another integrated health area is under way to support delivery of the clinic. The HSE has also sought to progress the multidisciplinary model of care, seeking to recruit optometrists and orthoptists to support the delivery of ophthalmology services. Furthermore, the HSE has undertaken a comprehensive validation exercise of all ophthalmology waiting lists in south Tipperary to support the prioritisation of patients and the planning of additional clinical activity.

The HSE remains fully committed to restoring a sustainable ophthalmology service in south Tipperary and will continue to pursue all available recruitment and service delivery options to achieve this objective as a matter of priority.

Deputy Michael Murphy: I thank the Minister of State for his reply. We now entering the third year of this crisis. These figures were made available to me back in December. There are 1,449 children under the age of four, 334 children between the ages of five and 17 and almost 600 adults on the waiting list, yet into the third year of this crisis we are still exploring other options. I was told in January or February of this year about the idea of a blitz clinic but that is still not in place. My appeal to the Minister of State is to engage with the Minister for Health to explore something I previously asked for, which is private provision, the temporary contract, and using the capacity in the private sector to outsource in particular for the children long on the waiting list until the blitz clinic in Waterford is up and running.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: To read out that statement is totally out of touch with the situation. The figures are stark. Many of us are directing elderly people to Belfast to get cataracts done - the Belfast or Blind bus. I have eye issues. I understand how difficult it is. We are not even talking about the 500 adults waiting. It is pathetic that three years on, with Dr. Hillary giving a year's notice and with plenty of time that this position is still not filled. Something else is going on.

I demand that we use the private resources that are out there, as Deputy Michael Murphy said, to deal with our youngest and brightest people and give them a fair chance in life. We have Children First legislation and everything else here. These are basic needs that are being deprived to children in south Tipperary. It is not acceptable. The reply the Minister of State read out here today is totally unacceptable into the third year of this crisis. He talks about exploring options. There must be an emergency blitz. It is not correct to say that they are being dealt with in Waterford. They are not.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta. I call an tAire Stáit.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: They do not even take them out of the hatch. They have too many there themselves.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): The Deputy's time has expired.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Once again, I thank Deputies Michael Murphy and Mattie McGrath for raising this important issue, which I am taking on behalf of the Minister for Health, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, on the need for strengthened ophthalmology services in south Tipperary. I will make sure to let her and the officials in the Department know the specific views that were made here today in the House on behalf of their constituents in south Tipperary.

While recruitment of a permanent consultant has been challenging, I wish to assure the Deputies that sustained and proactive efforts are ongoing. A further recruitment campaign is now progressing and, informed by previous experience, it is focused on securing a successful appointment. In parallel, there has been progress on service delivery. The expansion of multidisciplinary teams, including additional optometry and orthoptic resources will help improve access and patient flow.

Collaboration with University Hospital Waterford is also delivering practical benefits through the evaluation of waiting lists and the provision of additional clinics. Taken together, these actions demonstrate a co-ordinated focused response. Urgent cases continue to be managed to ensure that patients with the greatest needs are protected while long-term solutions are advanced. The HSE remains fully committed to restoring a sustainable ophthalmology service in south Tipperary and will continue to pursue all available recruitment and service delivery options to achieve this objective as a matter of priority.

Like Deputies Murphy and McGrath, the Minister for Health's clear objective remains the appointment of a permanent consultant and the full restoration of ophthalmology services for south Tipperary. Work continues, including interim arrangements, to achieve this. I will

personally bring the points made by both Deputies here today back to the Minister for Health, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, and departmental officials. The Minister for Health and I respect the mandate of the Deputies to come in here and represent their constituents in this particular matter.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Beidh an chéad ghnó eile ag tosú ag a 10 a chlog. We will suspend until 10 o'clock.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 9.52 a.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 10 a.m.

Sitting suspended at 9.52 a.m. and resumed at 10 a.m.

10 o'clock

Windfall Tax on the Excess Profits of Energy Companies: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- Irish households continue to face severe financial strain in the face of high and rising electricity prices;
- the average monthly wholesale electricity prices in Ireland have increased by 9.6 per cent in August, 2026 alone, and are up by 77 per cent year-on-year;
- retail electricity prices in Ireland were already the highest in Europe, with households paying an average of €480 per year more than the European Union (EU) average;
- retail electricity prices continue to rise rapidly, with a succession of eight providers having announced price increases in recent weeks, some of these increases in the double digits;
- a 1,000-litre fill of home heating oil now costs approximately €1,600, up more than 60 per cent in just the past year alone;
- according to the Central Statistics Office, the cost of household energy in Ireland has risen by a whopping 70 per cent in the past five years; and
- 323,559 Irish households were in electricity arrears in June according to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, amounting to around one in seven households;

further notes that:

- the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) recorded a pre-tax profit of €445.6 million for the first half of 2026, up from €351.6 million in the same period last year;
- it has recently been confirmed that the ESB Chief Executive Officer could see his salary hiked by a total of €161,000 by 2028, with a €90,000 increase to €410,000 per year having already been sanctioned;

- Energia recorded a pre-tax profit of €70 million for the second quarter of 2026, up 25 per cent year-on-year;
- Bord Gáis Energy recorded pre-tax profits of €50 million for the first six months of this year; and
- these kinds of bumper profits, and gold-plated salaries, are indicative of surging profits in the sector;

recognises that wholesale electricity prices are dictated largely by the cost of gas, meaning that energy companies that produce electricity from other sources, including renewables, can experience significant windfall gains when gas prices are high, as they are at present;

furthermore, notes that:

- the Government legislated in 2023, to introduce a temporary solidarity contribution and a cap on market revenues to clamp down on windfall gains in the energy sector;
- those measures, despite being in place for a relatively short period of time, raised a combined €456 million; and
- the Minister for Finance, has suggested that the State should wait for a joint EU approach to windfall taxes on the excess profits of energy companies, but Portugal has already moved ahead and introduced its own windfall tax; and

calls on the Government to:

- legislate to reintroduce both a market revenue cap and a temporary solidarity contribution, putting them on an independent statutory footing under Irish law that extends their operation for the period from 1st March, 2026 to 31st December, 2027; and
- use funds raised from taxing the windfall gains on energy companies to provide emergency relief to struggling individuals and families by immediately introducing a €400 energy credit, targeted at households earning up to €70,000.

For years, we have been told that the cost-of-living crisis, high energy bills and spiralling households costs are events beyond our control. First, it was the invasion of Ukraine and now it is the war with Iran. Every time there is an international crisis, Irish households are expected to absorb the shock. While we all know the Government did not cause those crises, neither did families all across this country. They did not cause the war in Ukraine or the war with Iran. Yet, time and again, they are asked to pay the price. Meanwhile, however, energy companies have continued to record substantial profits.

This motion is about more than energy and taxation policy; it is about protecting households that have been exposed to global shock after global shock while the Government has failed to insulate them. This motion is also about fairness because if there is anything Irish people know, it is how to be fair. They know when things are wrong. If households are expected to shoulder the cost of every international crisis, then energy companies cannot be allowed to pocket windfall gains while families fall further behind. We have the power to act to stop this happening, and we need to use that power. The Social Democrats are proposing that the Government protect households by introducing a windfall tax on energy companies' profits. This was done before at an EU level in 2022 following the outbreak of war in Ukraine and the

energy price shocks that followed. It is crucial that we act again – this time at a national level - to protect families against the current energy price crisis.

It is clear the Minister has failed to protect families so far. Ireland has the highest household electricity prices in Europe. They are a massive €480 more per year than the EU average. According to the Central Statistics Office, the cost of household energy in Ireland has risen by 70% since 2021 and roughly one in seven households is in arrears on its electricity bills. Meanwhile, energy companies continue to record substantial profits. ESB Networks recorded a pre-tax profit of €445 million for the first half of this year, which is €100 million more compared with this time last year. The CEO of ESB Networks could see his salary increase by a total of €161,000 by 2028. Energia recorded a pre-tax profit of €70 million for the second quarter of 2026 alone, while Bord Gáis Energy recorded a pre-tax of profit of €50 million for the first six months of this year. All the while, customers are facing even more electricity price hikes ahead of this winter. That is the stark contrast at the heart of this debate.

I know the position of the Government is to wait for a whole-of-EU approach to this where all EU states work in tandem, but that is not going to happen. The Government wants us to wait while electricity prices go up, more families fall into arrears, energy companies continue to record enormous profits and executives receive salary increases worth more than what many workers earn in an entire year. However, the Government can no longer hide behind the skirts of the EU. Only yesterday, the EU Commissioner for energy, Dan Jørgensen, made it clear that there would be no EU-wide windfall tax and that countries need to do this on a national basis. This is possible and the EU will support countries to do it. In fact, Portugal has already gone ahead and done it. We need to follow suit urgently.

The Government can no longer use the EU as an excuse. Families are facing bills today, this month and this winter. That is why the Social Democrats are calling for action now, rather than at some undefined point in the future. We are proposing that excess windfall profits be taxed and that the proceeds be returned directly to households through a targeted €400 energy credit for low- and middle-income families. The previous solidarity clause contribution and market revenue cap that was put in place raised approximately €450 million, so the legislative mechanism and precedent exist, as does the need. The only thing missing is political will. When one in seven households is already in electricity arrears, the question is not whether we can afford to act but, rather, how much longer families can afford to wait. When families are struggling to keep the lights on while energy companies are recording bumper profits from circumstances entirely outside of their control, the Government cannot simply shrug its shoulders and say, "That is the market". It has a responsibility to intervene and protect households, and that is exactly what this motion seeks to do. If it was right to bring in an energy windfall tax in 2022, it is right to do so again now. We ask the Government to move on it.

Deputy Daniel Ennis: I thank my colleague, Deputy Whitmore, for all her work on this to date. We are about to face into another winter where families will once again have to make incredibly difficult decisions about what they can afford. They will have to decide whether to heat their homes, put enough food on the table, cover school costs or pay electricity bills. For far too many people, it will come down to a stark choice between whether to heat or eat. All the while, energy companies are seeing profits soar and CEOs are seeing enormous pay increases. In the first half of this year alone, as Deputy Whitmore mentioned, ESB Networks

made €445 million in pre-tax profits. That is incredible. That is why we are proposing the windfall tax on excess energy profits, with the money raised used to fund a €400 energy credit for low-to-middle income households. These are households that are being squeezed the hardest by the cost-of-living crisis that we are all experiencing. They are hit with price increase after price increase right across the board, while energy companies continue to record these massive profits. We know the scale of the pressure people are under. One in every eight households is in arrears on its electricity bills, and we know this burden is particularly acute in low- and middle-income communities, such as those in my constituency of Dublin Central.

There is something fundamentally unfair about families struggling to keep on top of their bills while energy companies make enormous profits and CEOs see increases in their pay. Emergency supports alone are not enough, however. We also need to focus on bringing energy costs down permanently, which the Government has not focused on. For far too long, the Government has moved from one crisis to another without addressing the underlying problems. A failure to plan for energy price shocks means those with the least ability to absorb higher costs end up paying the higher price.

The Government has already recognised the principle behind what we are proposing. In 2023, it legislated for a windfall tax due to the war in Ukraine. If the principle was right then, why is it wrong now? Why should families facing another difficult winter be asked to shoulder the cost while extraordinary profits in the energy sector are left untouched? While it is true that the Government cannot control every international event that causes energy prices to rise, it absolutely can decide who carries the burden when those prices rise. Allowing households to absorb those higher bills while extraordinary profits go untouched is not inevitable; it is a political choice made by the Government.

The energy crisis and the wider cost-of-living crisis are squeezing families from every direction. I see that in my constituency where some of the most deprived areas in the whole country are located. I deal with awful cases every single day, including those involving elderly people staring into another winter having to decide whether to heat or eat.

The €400 energy credit targeted at low-to-middle income households would make a real and immediate difference to people who are struggling. Our proposal is straightforward: take a portion of the extraordinary profits generated during this energy crisis and put money back in the pockets of the people and households that have been hit the hardest. More fundamentally, a windfall tax is about fairness. It ensures the burden of an energy crisis does not continuously fall on ordinary households while exceptional profits are made elsewhere. Families should not have to choose between heating their homes, feeding their children or paying their bills. They should not be asked to do this while energy companies are recording extraordinary profits.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I commend my colleague, Deputy Whitmore, on this motion, as well as on her broader work on the cost of living and a just transition. One statistic in this motion should stop us in our tracks, namely, that 323,559 households were in electricity arrears at the end of June, which is one in every seven households. Prices are now climbing again. Wholesale electricity prices rose almost 77% in the year to August, including a 9.6% jump in August alone. People have been absorbing these increases for years. There comes a point where there simply is not another €20 or €30 to find. This pressure is also not evenly shared. The latest CSO figures show that people severely limited in their daily activities by a health

problem were more than three times more likely to be unable to afford to keep their home adequately warm.

More than 17% of those households reported greater difficulty making ends meet. For many disabled people, higher energy use is far from discretionary. Extra heating and lighting can be part of the cost of disability. You cannot tell somebody who needs a warmer home because of disability or ill health simply to turn down the thermostat. There is also a clear climate and energy security argument, which is tied in with affordability in this motion. Ireland imported 78% of all the energy we used last year. Almost 93% of those imports were fossil fuels, including over 82% of our gas. When international gas markets go haywire, Irish households get hit. We saw it after Russia invaded Ukraine and we are seeing huge volatility again now. Reducing our dependence on imported fossil fuels is climate action but it is also a protection against the next energy price shock. We need far more indigenous renewable energy alongside the grid storage and interconnection needed to use it properly.

I am not suggesting that every euro of profit made by an energy company is illegitimate. ESB has an enormous programme of infrastructure investment ahead of it, which is essential to the transition. Windfall profits are different. The Government already accepted that principle. In 2023, it introduced a solidarity contribution on exceptional fossil fuel profits and a cap on the market revenues of certain electricity generators because soaring gas prices were creating gains completely out of line with normal market conditions. Those mechanisms are effective so it is difficult to explain to a family falling behind on their electricity bill why, when exceptional market conditions are again producing exceptional gains, Government should simply stand back and wait, particularly when the ESB reported €445.6 million in pre-tax profit for the first six months of this year, with its chief executive salary being increased to €410,000. This motion proposes using revenue from renewed windfall measures to provide a targeted €400 credit to households earning up to €70,000. That is immediate relief.

The longer-term answer has to be bigger than another credit every time international fossil fuel markets explode. We need an energy system that produces more of our own clean power, wastes less energy through poorly-insulated homes and leaves families far less exposed to the price of imported gas. That is climate policy, it is energy security and increasingly it is basic cost-of-living policy.

Deputy Jen Cummins: I thank my colleague, Deputy Jennifer Whitmore, for bringing forward this important and timely motion. Deputy Whitmore and the Social Democrats have consistently raised the enormous pressure that energy costs are placing on households. This motion puts forward a practical solution that the Government always says we do not do but we are putting forward a solution that is simple. When energy companies are making extraordinary profits, some of the people who are struggling the most need to know where those profits are going and it needs to come back to the people who are sitting at their tables and cannot afford to pay these bills. More than 323,000 electricity accounts are in arrears. Wholesale electricity prices increased by 9.6% in August alone and are 77% higher than they were a year ago. Irish households are paying some of the highest electricity bills in Europe.

At the same time, we are seeing extraordinary profits. The ESB recorded pre-tax profits of €445.6 million in just the first six months of this year. Energia recorded pre-tax profits of €70 million in the second quarter, while Bord Gáis Energy recorded €50 million in pre-tax profits

for the first half of this year. There is something fundamentally wrong when families are sitting around their kitchen tables trying to work out which bill they are going to pay because they cannot pay all of them and when the electricity bill comes in, that sometimes is the one that has to wait. We know that a windfall tax can work because we have done it already. The previous temporary solidarity contribution and the market revenue cap raised a combined €456 million. Our proposal would reintroduce those measures and ring-fence the proceeds to provide a targeted €400 energy credit to households with incomes below €70,000.

It is really important to say that it is targeted. Targeted supports are what are needed in this country, not universal for every single person and for those who can already afford to pay their electricity bills. As education spokesperson, I want to put this in the context of what families are already facing. Barnardos found that more than half of parents are worried about meeting the back-to-school costs this year. Some secondary school families are spending over €1,100 getting a child ready for school, and 57% of secondary school parents are facing a bill for digital devices with an average cost of €447. When a child finishes school and might go to third level, those costs do not disappear. Research highlighted earlier this year that the estimated spending for a young person in third level who is living out of the family home is €16,000 a year. If the young person is staying at home, it is €8,000. That is a lot of money.

Families do not experience any of these costs in isolation. A family could have one child in primary school, one in secondary and one in college. They are paying for uniforms, devices, transport, food and accommodation for those students. They are also in their own home paying for rent or mortgage. They are doing the weekly shop, the cost of which has also gone up. They are trying to fill their car with petrol or diesel, which has gone up too. The electricity bill comes through the door, if they do not get it online, of course, since I appreciate it is not the 1980s. All of these bills are not luxuries. Education is not a luxury. Heating your home is not a luxury. Turning on the lights is not a luxury.

People are working, they are budgeting, and they are cutting back. They are doing everything that has been asked of them and yet for far too many families in this country, the numbers simply do not add up anymore. I hear that in my clinics in Dublin South-Central. The Minister of State, Deputy Ardagh, and I share the constituency, and I am sure she hears it as well when she is canvassing. Parents are exhausted from constantly trying to make choices about what they can afford this week and what will have to wait until next week. I raised this in the House before. In April, I told the Government that affordability was the single biggest issue being raised with me in Dublin South-Central. People are telling me that they cannot afford their groceries, their rent, and their energy costs. We are now heading into winter, and those pressures have not disappeared. The Government needs to get a grip on the cost of living. It cannot continue to stand back while household bills rise. The energy companies simultaneously record enormous profits. It should not fall on the families. We should not have to wait and tell families they have to wait until everything is sorted out and place the blame elsewhere. We have an opportunity to help families in need now. I urge the Government to support this motion. Introduce a windfall tax on excess energy profits and ensure that the money raised goes directly towards households which need it most.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Catherine Ardagh): I move amendment No. 1:

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

notes that the Government:

- remains deeply concerned about the conflict in the Middle East and its impact on energy prices;
- is acutely aware of the impact on households and businesses of the recent increases in the cost of energy, and is actively monitoring the current geopolitical situation and its impact on costs;
- has taken significant action to help households and businesses with the cost of fuel and energy by introducing one of the most comprehensive support packages in the European Union (EU); and
- affirms that energy affordability is a priority, with the Energy Affordability Action Plan to be submitted to Government in the coming weeks and consideration ongoing of supports for household; and

further notes that:

- the ongoing conflict in the Middle East has caused international wholesale gas prices to increase which has a significant knock-on impact on retail electricity prices;
- supplier hedging strategies have and are continuing to help cushion households from the full volatility in international wholesale energy markets;
- price setting by electricity suppliers, including standing charges is a commercial and operational matter for the companies concerned and each such company has its own different approach to pricing decisions over time, in accordance with factors such as, their overall company strategic direction and costs such as, staffing, tax, and infrastructure;
- the Government understands that any price increase can be a challenge for households and businesses;
- for that reason, the Government has taken action to help households and businesses with the cost of fuel and energy;
- extensions to the package of temporary fuel supports have brought the total cost of these measures to over €1.4 billion and are helping to reduce the cost burden at the petrol pump;
- successive budgets have provided targeted support to help households with energy costs;
- in Budget 2026, key measures included an extension until 2030 of the 9 per cent Value-Added-Tax rate currently applied to gas and electricity bills, enhanced social protection payments, including an increase to the Fuel Allowance weekly rate and an expansion in the eligibility rules, and a record allocation of €640 million for the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) retrofit schemes;
- at the same time, additional retrofitting supports have been rolled out to further help households, capital expenditure of over €2 billion has delivered over 287,000 home energy upgrades from 2019 to the end of August 2026, including over 39,500 fully funded upgrades for households at risk of energy poverty under the Warmer Homes Scheme;

- in January this year, we expanded and reformed retrofitting schemes to ensure more homeowners can receive grants, the new measures include, increased attic and wall insulation supports, an increased grant of €12,500 for heat pump installation, and new grants for windows and doors;
- almost 89,000 applications have been processed to the end of August 2026, an increase of 116 per cent on the same period last year;
- this year to the end of August, 2026, almost 42,000 homes have been upgraded through SEAI schemes, including over 6,800 homes at risk of energy poverty under the Warmer Homes Scheme;
- the latest Eurostat report, (comparing electricity prices across the EU), outlines that Ireland had the fifth highest for household electricity prices in the second half of 2025, when adjusted to take account of the 'Purchasing Power Standard' (i.e. practical affordability – taking account of household income);
- the four biggest energy retailers have confirmed that hardship funds and focused measures are in place for any customers in difficulty;
- switching energy supplier or plan could save the average electricity and gas customers up to €700 and €400 (respectively) annually;
- protections are in place for customers experiencing difficulties in paying their bills and households struggling with their bill, are strongly encouraged to engage with their supplier;
- the Department of Social Protection can also provide support through the Additional Needs Payment to help households meet expenses, including difficulties with fuel bills;
- the Government has also established the National Energy Affordability Taskforce (NEAT) to identify, assess and implement measures that will enhance energy affordability for households and businesses, while delivering key renewable commitments and protecting security of supply and economic stability;
- the NEAT has noted a wide array of interventions, including those such as a market's revenue cap and/or solidarity contribution, which in a previous form were based on EU-wide regulations and decisions and will continue to consider all potential interventions and developments in this regard;
- the Government will continue to monitor and assess the situation in relation to energy costs;
- the NEAT continues to work intensively on an Energy Affordability Action Plan to be submitted to Government in the coming weeks; and
- the Government will also make a range of relevant decisions as part of Budget 2027."

I speak on behalf of the Government on the Social Democrats' motion calling for the introduction of a market revenue cap and a temporary solidarity contribution on the excess profits of energy companies. The Government proposes to reject this motion and amend it. The conflict in the Middle East and in Ukraine have caused significant disruption to the global energy markets that we all know. The Government recognises the pressure that resulting high

energy prices are placing on Irish consumers and businesses. We are actively monitoring the current geopolitical situation and its impact on costs to households and businesses. The Government understands that any price increase can be a challenge for households and businesses. As a result, we have been proactive and introduced a series of measures to reduce fuel prices. Further measures are under consideration by the national energy affordability task force and as part of the budgetary process. Specifically on fuel, the package of Government support measures, which now totals over €1.4 billion, is helping to reduce the cost burden at the petrol pump and assist key sectors such as agriculture and haulage that are critical to keeping our economy moving.

A range of measures in budget 2026 also supported households with energy costs, including an extension until 2030 of the 9% VAT rate currently applied to gas and electricity bills and enhanced social protection payments, including an increase to the fuel allowance rate and an expansion in the eligibility, as well as a €400 income tax disregard for households involved in micro-generation, which was extended for a further three years until the end of 2028.

The best way of insulating our economy and society from fuel price shocks is to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. That is why we are investing record amounts in retrofitting, both through part- and fully-funded schemes. Budget 2026 provided a record allocation of €640 million for the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's residential and community grant schemes, allowing us to target 73,000 home energy upgrades this year alone. In January this year, we expanded and reformed retrofitting schemes to ensure more homeowners can receive grants. The new measures included increased attic and wall insulation supports, an increased grant of €12,500 for heat pump installation and new grants for windows and doors. Simple upgrades like attic insulation, cavity wall or external wall insulation can reduce heating bills by up to €230 annually. A full home retrofit can lead to savings of €750 to €1,120 per year on energy costs.

Almost 89,000 applications have been processed to the end of August 2026.

As of yesterday, the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, and the Government have also approved an expanded range of grants for people, including a new €2,000 boiler scrappage grant, a new grant for battery storage and expanded access to certain measures for warmer home eligibility applicants and those in rental accommodation scheme, RAS, tenancies. These measures are aimed at making it easier and more accessible for people to reduce their energy bills. This compares with 41,100 applications received by the end of August last year. This is a 111% increase year on year and follows changes to the schemes the Minister introduced earlier this year. Capital expenditure of more than €2 billion delivered more than 287,000 home energy upgrades between 2019 and August 2026, including more than 39,500 fully funded upgrades for households at risk of energy poverty under the warmer homes scheme. As of the end of August 2026, the domestic solar PV scheme has supported more than 21,000 homes to install solar PV panels this year and more than 35,000 applications have been received. This is a 72% increase in applications year on year and indicates that the scheme is working extremely well and that householders are recognising the benefit of investing in solar PV.

A number of protections are in place for customers experiencing difficulties paying their bills. Anyone who is struggling with their bill is strongly encouraged to engage with their supplier. Suppliers have hardship funds and focused measures in place for any customers who find themselves in difficulty and will not disconnect customers who engage with them. In

addition, the Department of Social Protection can also provide support through the additional needs payment to help households meet expenses, including those who face difficulty with fuel bills.

The national energy affordability task force, which the Minister chairs, will have a key role in identifying measures to enhance energy affordability. This cross-government task force was established to identify, assess and implement measures that will enhance energy affordability for households and businesses while delivering key renewable commitments and protecting security of supply and economic stability. The task force is working extensively on the energy affordability action plan to be submitted to the Government in the coming weeks. This action plan will be focused on short, medium and longer term measures to support households and businesses to meet their energy costs.

The energy affordability action plan includes the identification of measures, such as a market revenues cap, which, in a previous form, were based on the 2022 EU Council Regulation (EU) 2022/185. Ireland would engage constructively on the development of proposals from the European Commission on a potential EU-wide windfall tax or levy if such proposals are brought forward, as outlined by Deputy Whitmore. It continues to be the Government's view that tackling the energy crisis in a co-ordinated way among EU member states is preferable, given the interconnectedness of the EU energy markets. Governments across Europe are rightly attentive to developments in energy markets and their impact on households, businesses and the wider economy. The Tánaiste and Minister for Finance, in the context of Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU, received a joint letter from six EU member state finance Ministers regarding a windfall levy on exceptional profits made by oil companies as a result of heightened prices due to the conflict in the Middle East. This item was put on the agenda by the Tánaiste and discussed as part of the recent informal ECOFIN meeting in Dublin. As a result, the Tánaiste requested the European Commission to reflect on this discussion and report back on the issue in the upcoming ECOFIN meeting in October.

The Government introduced substantial supports during the volatile period in April. They are timely and necessary, and we will continue to monitor the situation closely. Supporting those most vulnerable in society must remain a priority and the Government will continue to do that. The best long-term approach for Ireland to insulate consumers from volatility on international wholesale energy markets is to invest in energy efficiency and renewable energy. Cutting our dependence on fossil fuels and generating power from our own renewable sources will ensure cleaner and cheaper energy in the long term. I reiterate that the Government rejects this motion. I propose the Government counter-motion, which more accurately reflects the reality of the situation.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: It is disappointing to see again how little the Government has engaged with our reasoned, evidence-based and solidly worked motion, which Deputy Whitmore and the Social Democrats have put a lot of work into. Once again, it proposes to "delete all words after Dáil Éireann". It is important that people at home know that this is how the Government approaches most Private Members' motions tabled by the Opposition. It proposes to delete all words after "Dáil Éireann", completely ignore the reasoned and evidence-based solutions we have put forward and reiterate how great the Government is in what it is doing.

I will speak to three issues, namely, the urgency of this issue, the fact that the electricity companies can afford this, and the fact that ordinary people are now choosing between heating and eating. People do not have a choice on how to fix this, but the Government does. On the first issue, urgency, winter is closing in and there is a complete lack of Government action on how to properly address this, both immediately and in the medium and long term. The figure indicating that 323,559 households are now in arrears should be haunting all the dreams of the Government. It is clocking up further day by day, just as the electricity meters are, as people who are under pressure from the cost-of-living crisis watch them at home.

The Minister of State spoke immediately about this being affected by external markets and geopolitical forces. We are all aware of that but it is up to the Government to use the tools available to it to fix this. My party is coming forward with solutions that the Government is choosing to completely reject. The Minister of State referred to the ECOFIN meeting of last week. My colleague, Deputy Cian O'Callaghan, spoke about a windfall tax and the Department of Finance was quick to come in and say the issue was on the agenda. It was on the lunchtime agenda of the ECOFIN meeting following pressure from other Ministers. I am sorry, but the Government was dragged kicking and screaming to even discuss a windfall tax at that appropriate forum.

One of the other things I picked up from the language in the Minister of State's statement was the term "energy affordability". Energy affordability is crucial, but what seems to have completely evaporated from the lexicon of Government Ministers is energy poverty. That is what people are experiencing, and that is the urgency the Government is failing to deal with. Electricity companies can take the hit. We are seeing record profits. ESB pre-tax profits were €445.6 million for the first half of 2026. There are huge price rises, with energy costs per household up 70% in the past five years and the price of home heating oil up 60% since last year. We are not saying that this motion would fix everything. We are not arrogant enough to suggest that, but the urgency is due to Government inaction on energy costs and its supports for people.

The Government has the tools at its disposal to do this. Ordinary people do not. They need to meet their basic needs for survival through the winter. We have the option, as a Parliament, to help them. The Government has an option to help them. For the older people worried about turning on their heat, the young families who do not know how they are going to pay their bills and everyone who is suffering from the soaring cost-of-living crisis, the Government is not offering any decent solutions. We have put forward an actual solution here but the Government in its countermotion and the Minister of State in her speech have chosen to completely ignore the substance of our motion. Does the Minister of State know how insulting it is for us, as a party and as parliamentarians, and for our supporters, voters and members, that the Government does not even bother to countenance it? I understand there is a meeting of energy Ministers but not even the junior Ministers in the Department bothered to turn up today. I urge the Minister of State to withdraw the countermotion and support the introduction of windfall taxes.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I thank Deputy Whitmore for all the work she does in this area. The Minister of State ended her contribution saying the Government countermotion "more accurately reflects the reality". I begin with a simple premise. There are 323,000 households in arrears on their electricity bills in Ireland today. There are people struggling to pay their rent and their bills. There are people who are terrified about those bills coming through the door.

At the same time, we have energy companies recording eye-watering profits. I know they will be mentioned in the contributions to this debate, but some of those figures are astounding. The ESB recorded pre-tax profits of €445 million in the first six months of the year. Energia recorded €70 million in pre-tax profits in a single quarter. Bord Gáis recorded a profit of €50 million in the first six months of the year. It is blindingly obvious to all of us that the Government should act and that the countermotion does not better reflect the reality. It does not reflect the reality on the ground for many of my constituents and, I am sure, many of the Minister of State's constituents, who are genuinely terrified.

We are simply saying that we are in a time of great need. There are people in substantial energy arrears, with average arrears standing at close to €500.

They cannot go any further. At the same time, energy companies are profiting from the very same crisis that is creating fear in the households of constituents of mine and the Minister of State and across the length and breadth of Ireland. This is a binary choice. Who does the Government believe should suffer more in a time of crisis: energy companies, which are profiteering from this crisis, or householders who have told the Government they are struggling?

Over the last couple of weeks, it has been common for Ministers to go on air and say they will not be able to solve every crisis. Maybe they could just pick one or two and say they will solve them. In the great crisis of our time, people are genuinely fearful of how they will heat their homes or, in the absence of that, what they will sacrifice to be able to be warm in the evenings. The Government can actually solve that. We are not coming in here and asking for something that cannot be done. It is not a pie-in-the-sky policy. It is something the Government has done before and has legislated for before. This is within its gift. We do not have to wait to be told we are the good little boys of Europe. We can acknowledge that households are struggling, make the requisite decision to alleviate some of that and have it paid for through the profits of energy companies. It is that simple.

The Minister of State can think of whatever constituent she likes. I am thinking of some of the ones I met when I was out canvassing the other night, who told me they are fearful of the winter. I want to prioritise addressing their fears over the profits of energy companies. I hope the Government will reflect on that reality.

Deputy Rory Hearne: The Minister of State set out that Ireland would engage constructively with the development of proposals for a potential EU-wide windfall tax levy. She also talked about what the Tánaiste had done on this. The European Commissioner for energy, however, has said very clearly that the EU is not planning any EU-wide tax on windfall profits and actually said yesterday that the Commission will help countries to develop schemes themselves. What is the Government doing here? Who is it kidding? If the Government actually wanted to introduce a windfall tax, the European Commission is saying very clearly that it would help us. There is nothing stopping us and there is no EU-wide windfall tax coming. Therefore, it is down to the Government to do this and it can do it. This is all just excuses and nonsense. For some reason, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael seem absolutely unwilling or scared, or lack the courage, to put in place a windfall tax on energy companies. The Government needs to say why that is because there is no excuse.

I am not sure if the Minister of State has read the shocking cost-of-living report by Barnardos. Has she read it? Families were asked if the cost-of-living crisis has negatively affected their children. One in five said that the cost of living has negatively impacted their children. That is up from 12% in 2022. It asked how often people worry about being able to provide their children with daily essentials. Some 29% of parents worry every day about providing their children with essentials. Half of those with incomes under €30,000 are worried about being able to provide their children with daily essentials.

The figures on food are truly scandalous. Some 44% of parents are skipping meals or reducing portion sizes so that their children will have enough to eat. Some 30% felt at some point that they did not have enough food to feed their children. For Christ's sake, 30% of parents in this country are saying they have not had enough food to feed their children. These are not Famine times. This is the point at which we are the wealthiest we have ever been. What is going on? The economy is fundamentally not working for people. On healthcare and additional needs, I am dealing with people in my constituency who cannot afford to get the services their children need because they do not have the money to pay for them.

In the Barnardos report, one parent said, "For me, my mental health is a current issue due to not eating well enough or taking supplements while breastfeeding as I cannot afford them so my hormones are imbalanced." Another parent referred to "Putting off dentist visits when they are long overdue because of the expense." This is not good enough. We need this windfall tax and we need serious measures because this is an absolute scandal.

Deputy Pa Daly: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing this very important procedure before the House. At a time when Ireland has the highest energy bills in Europe and over 1 million households can expect high bills from tomorrow, and when energy arrears are at record highs and continue to rise month after month, it is indefensible that energy giants are making extraordinary profits while ordinary people are left behind. That is why we are supporting calls for the immediate introduction of a robust windfall tax. This debate comes down to one simple question: who should benefit from a crisis?

Families across the State have been hammered by soaring electricity and gas costs. People are cutting back on essentials and falling into debt. Meanwhile, energy companies continue to rake in profits on a scale that many ordinary people cannot even comprehend. These are windfall profits driven by war, international instability and global energy shocks. Profits are generated because families have no choice but to pay to heat their homes and do whatever it costs to keep their lights on.

Just two months after increasing prices for over 1 million households, the ESB announced profits of €636 million. What message is that sending to struggling families? When people are being told to tighten their belts, cut their spending and absorb even higher costs, they see these types of profits and executives receiving enormous pay increases while profits continue to soar. The most recent analysis of major oil companies found that the world's eight largest oil firms amassed \$93 billion in profits during just three months of the recent conflict involving Iran. While families worry about paying their next bill, somebody else is counting record profits and that cannot be defended. A windfall tax is simply about fairness and justice. Companies making crisis profits should make a fair contribution back to society and that is just common sense.

Let us be very clear about another excuse the Government can no longer hide behind. We heard the Tánaiste suggest that any action on windfall taxes is better taken at European level, implying that Ireland should wait for Brussels before acting. However, even the European Commission has directly contradicted that position. Yesterday the climate Commissioner, Wopke Hoekstra, said - I think was in response to one of Deputy Whitmore's questions - that taxation in this area remains a matter for individual member states and that member states can act if they so choose. He even went so far as to suggest that pursuing a common EU approach was not the best way forward due to legal complications and the need for consensus among member states. He made it clear that national governments already have the powers to introduce those matters themselves. In other words, Ireland does not need any permission from Brussels, we do not have to wait for any European-wide agreement and we do not need another excuse for delay.

He said that taxation is the prerogative of member states. The power exists, the legal authority exists, the precedent exists and countries across Europe have already demonstrated that these measures can be implemented. When the Government claims its hands are tied, that simply does not add up. The obstacle is the lack of political will. The truth is that Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the supporting Independents can introduce a windfall tax if they so choose. They have the power to do so but the question is whether they are going to act. Why do they refuse to act while families are facing the highest electricity prices in the European Union, record energy arrears and another winter of rising bills? It is a Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael choice, and ordinary workers and families are paying the price for that choice every single day.

Sinn Féin would make a different choice. We would introduce a 75% windfall tax on excess profits and reintroduce energy credits to provide immediate support in the short term to households. We would reform the energy market to hold companies accountable and end the energy rip-off that consumers face. Every euro raised through that tax would be used to reduce bills, tackle arrears, support retrofitting programmes and help those trapped in energy poverty. It is an essential public good. As we approach another winter, families need action not excuses. The Government is asking households to absorb rising costs while allowing the corporations to keep extraordinary profits. It is not fairness, it is not leadership and it certainly is not inevitable. It is a choice that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have made. They should stop protecting the excess profits of the corporations, stop defending an energy system that is failing ordinary people and introduce a windfall tax without delay.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Ar an gcéad dul síos, gabhaim buíochas leis na Daonlathaithe Sóisialta as an rún a thabhairt os comhair na Dála. Gan dabht, is iad costais fuinnimh an brú is mó atá ar theaghlaigh sa lá atá inniu ann. An choicís seo amháin, ag tosú Dé Luain, beidh breis agus milliún teaghlach i ndiaidh a gcuid billí fuinnimh a fheiceáil ag dul in airde. Seachtain i ndiaidh na cáinainéise, beidh an faoiseamh beag a gheobhaidh siad slogtha ag costais fuinnimh atá ag dul i méid. Anois, agus muid ag díriú isteach ar an gheimhreadh, chímí an líon tithe nach bhfuil ábalta a gcuid billí fuinnimh a íoc ag dul in airde agus in airde. Chímí fosta an líon daoine atá ag streachailt chun solas agus teas a choinneáil ar siúl ina gcuid tithe ag dul in airde.

On Monday, in less than a week, more than a million households will begin to see yet another energy bill hike. A week after the budget, whatever little relief people are to get will be swallowed up by rising energy costs. We are heading into winter with record numbers of

households unable to pay their electricity and gas bills. Record numbers are struggling to keep the lights on and the heat running. More than 300,000 households across the State are in arrears with their electricity bills. One in four gas customers cannot pay their bills. Those figures are only the tip of the iceberg. They do not include the families that are cutting back on groceries and other basics to cover these bills. They do not include the households on prepaid meters that are going without heat or running the credit until it runs out. Those people, who are sitting in cold homes, never show up in the official arrears data. Neither do families who cannot afford to fill their oil tanks before winter sets in. This crisis is everywhere. Every town, every village and every county is feeling it. If the Government refuses to restore energy credits in this budget, then things are only going to get worse. Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Independents who support the Government were warned before last year's budget. The energy regulator told them that ending energy credits would push more households into arrears. They ignored those warnings and that is exactly what has happened since. Now, record numbers of people cannot pay their bills, exactly as predicted.

Trump's reckless war in Iran did not create this crisis but it has made it far more severe. Rising global energy prices make the Government's refusal to restore energy credits even more indefensible but that does not mean Ministers can get away with shrugging their shoulders and blaming events overseas. This is not just about geopolitics. It is about choices that are made right here in Ireland by this Government. It is about a system that leaves households exposed to soaring bills while energy companies rake in massive profits. Energy credits must be reinstated. They can be partly funded through a windfall tax on these excess profits. However, when I was debating this matter with the Minister for Finance, Deputy Simon Harris, last night, he once again turned his back on this common-sense solution.

This Government seems determined to let energy companies away with it and to let them cash in while workers, families and pensioners pay the price. The cost of extracting gas from the Corrib gas field has not increased overnight and yet we are still being charged more and more when that gas reaches the market. What is worse still is that we maintain a pricing system where the price of electricity generated from wind and solar is driven up by the price of gas. When gas prices rise, consumers pay more for all electricity. Energy companies are making a killing while households are getting absolutely hammered. Even yesterday, the EU Commissioner called the Government out on this when he said very clearly that, if this is to happen, it is to happen at the level of individual countries. The nonsense from the Government in hiding behind Europe on this issue needs to end. The Government can, should and must act.

This Government has choices. What it lacks is the power to intervene. The political will to put families and workers first is simply not there at Cabinet level. That is why this debate is important. That is what this debate comes down to. Whose side is the Government on? When families are choosing between heating their homes and putting food on the table, the answer cannot be to do nothing. When pensioners are afraid to switch on the heat and parents are worrying about the next bill to come through the door, the State has a responsibility to act, to restore the energy credits, to tax the excess profits, to cut the bills and to take a side. It must stop being on the side of the energy companies that are raking it in when ordinary decent Irish people are being hammered by these Bills. The Government must give households the support they desperately need. It must bring back the energy credits and tax the excess profits of these companies.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Just two months after the State-owned ESB raised its prices for over 1 million customers, it posted profits of €636 million and gave its chief executive a 29% increase, raising his salary from €318,000 to €410,000. That is €92,000 of an increase. The Sinn Féin MEP Lynn Boylan has published research that shows that ordinary households are paying the price for data centre connections. We have seen a surge in connections to the grid that are the equivalent of 160,000 homes. Record numbers of people are in arrears with over 322,000 families in arrears. Where is the help? Where is the support? This Government is stripping them of the one thing that gave them help, the energy credits. I have to believe that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael do not give a damn about our ordinary workers and families. People will be back on the streets. They do not want to be on the streets but they will have to be. Does the Minister of State know why? It is because, if they do not, this Government will not help them. People are angry. They are hurting.

On Monday, a 74-year-old lady contacted me. She cannot turn on the heating. She asked me to come up to the Dáil to tell the Government that older people, families and workers need help. Will the Minister of State do something for them or is this going to be another budget for the rich and for the speculators? It is about time that this Government stood up for ordinary working people.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: Tá an geimhreadh ag teacht. The winter is coming. I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this important motion. Behind every statistic we discuss here today are real people and real families. Week in, week out, across Mayo, I meet older people, people with disabilities, people with chronic illnesses and families who are genuinely afraid to use electricity or to put the heating on. People who have worked hard all their lives, paid their taxes and contributed to their communities are now watching the meter and worrying about every unit of electricity they use. This Government says that this budget will be a budget for workers. What about the workers who come home in the evening and cannot afford to use energy in their homes or to turn on their heating? Some of these people will sit cold in their own homes because they are terrified of the bill coming through the door. This is taking place on the Minister of State and the Government's watch. In one of the richest economies in the world, with a budget surplus of €10 billion, this is utterly shameful.

Ireland has some of the highest household electricity prices in the EU. Record numbers of households are in arrears with their electricity bills while private energy companies make millions and billions in profits. That includes the Corrib gas project in my own area. The ESB, which we must remember is majority State-owned, recently reported €377 million in profits after tax for the first half of this year. That is up more than 20% on last year. Its CEO is being handed a pay increase of €90,000 for a job well done. Think about the contrast and how we treat the profits being made not because of extra work being done but because of the geopolitical situation. On the one side, there is hundreds of millions in profits and on the other side are pensioners who are afraid to turn on the heating.

The Government tells us that the international markets are to blame and that its hands are tied but it can act. It has a duty and a responsibility to act. This is about political choices. It is about putting ordinary hard-working people first. The Government should introduce a windfall tax on excess profits, reintroduce the energy credits and reform the energy market. It is very simple. The money raised should all go directly to these struggling households and to reducing bills, tackling arrears, supporting retrofitting and protecting people who are

experiencing poverty, including energy poverty and food poverty. Nobody in Mayo or anywhere else should be freezing in their homes while extraordinary profits are being made from an energy crisis. When the Minister of State pushes through the amendment to this motion, I want her to think about the pensioners and the families she is turning her back on. It is not right. The solution is there. The Government needs to act now.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Ireland has the most expensive electricity in Europe today. That did not happen by accident. We had a proud history in this State. We built Ardnacrusha, made possible by the visionaries who built that when this was a poor State with few resources. That led to the electrification of the entire State. We had the cheapest electricity because we controlled our own resources but then, when Europe talked about privatisation, we did it with gusto. We did it even more firmly than Margaret Thatcher's Government across the water. We handed over this precious resource to the private sector, which has profited from it ever since. That is how we got from the point where we had the cheapest electricity, publicly owned, to the most expensive electricity in Europe.

The Minister for energy, Darragh O'Brien, has met only one energy company this year - one - back in January. No effort is being made to hold them to account. The last time people got energy credits was when people were voting at the last election almost two years ago. It was so cynical. The Government is making no attempts to get those costs down by engaging with the energy companies. Is it any wonder the Government will not even consider a windfall tax? A windfall tax would give the Government the resources to bring back the energy credits. The Government has them anyway but it would have additional resources. It could look at a retrofit programme across the State. It could take more pressure off people in terms of diesel, petrol and home heating oil. I have no doubt the measures the Government will take in the budget will be half measures again. Why? Because the Government will not stand up to the energy companies that have profited off the backs of our people.

It was the fault of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael when they were in government. It was their policies that handed over this precious resource, built on the backs of visionaries and the Irish people. It was handed over for profit. The parties did not need to go as far as they did. We are asking them to listen to this motion from the Social Democrats, fully supported by Sinn Féin and, I have no doubt, by the vast majority of the Opposition because it is common sense. It gives the Government the resources to do what is right. This is not a tax on innovation or resourcefulness. It is a tax on profits that came on the back of wars in other countries. It makes sense and the Government should do it.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: As the Minister of State knows, energy bills are putting huge pressure on workers and families. One in seven households in this State is in arrears on their electricity bills. At the same time, energy companies have been making extraordinary profit from the energy crisis. That is why we in Sinn Féin support a 75% windfall tax on those exceptional profits. Those companies should contribute to dealing with the consequences of the prices. Instead of filling the pockets of their shareholders and executives, the money should go towards reducing bills, tackling energy arrears, retrofitting homes and helping people living in energy poverty, older people, households with young children and families with people who have disabilities. We also need to reform that energy market so that workers and families are not paying the price while companies make huge profits.

In Kilmeaden, County Waterford, the community is facing a massive proposed data centre and, effectively, an associated power plant. I have submitted an objection to that development and people locally are asking very reasonable questions about what this means for the community, the electricity grid and the wider energy system. If it goes ahead, not only will the scale of electricity demand swallow up a huge amount of additional generation in the south east for many years, including any additional energy from renewable means, but it will push up energy prices for ordinary families. That is something this Government needs to contend with as well.

Around Dungarvan, we are also seeing multiple wind energy developments proposed in the hills and countryside. The applications are coming in one after the other, while our national wind energy guidelines are now 20 years old. For years, the Government has promised to update them but repeatedly kicked the issue down the road. Local authorities are asked to deal with modern developments using a framework designed for a very different era and for different technology. That is how we end up with a wild west approach to energy generation and the regulation of energy companies, which leaves workers and families behind.

Communities deserve clear national rules and proper planning and workers and families need a break. Today, there is an initiative taking place across the State, Walk Out for Women, in solidarity with women and girls to take a stand against gender-based and sexual violence. I will be walking out of Leinster House with many of my colleagues to show support for that campaign.

Deputy Ged Nash: I will be sharing some time with my party colleague Deputy Conor Sheehan. Here we go again. We are in the same situation we were in just a couple of short years ago after Vladimir Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine. We are here again dealing with the same set of circumstances as a consequence of Donald Trump's misadventure in and on Iran. Anyone who has been awake for the last five years will know that an energy crisis is only really a crisis for the end user, the consumer, the regular citizen and the small business already struggling to make ends meet.

We know that for the energy companies, however, every crisis is an opportunity. As the motion from the Social Democrats sets out, the energy companies across this land, Europe and the globe are raking in supernormal profits. That is not because of the genius of their business managers and engineers but because they are profiting from the consequences of war, plain and simple. Irish people are paying record prices in the context of the European Union, as has already been put on the record, for the energy we all should really be taking for granted. A few short years ago, many of us in the Opposition fought tooth and nail to make the case to the Government for the introduction of windfall taxes on the supernormal profits of energy companies.

Finally, the Government moved, at a glacial pace, to the Opposition's position. The net result of that was the generation of close to €500 million over two years, which assisted the previous Government in its response to the energy crisis experienced by households and businesses at that time. In other words, the template is there. Last week at Leaders' Questions, I raised with the Minister for Finance the idea a windfall tax should be placed on the excess profits of power companies. We got the usual kind of response we expect from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. They said that they were looking at this, yes, and that they were having a

conversation at European Union level. They said that Economic and Financial Affairs Council, ECOFIN, was looking at it and that they might have a response in a couple of weeks. It is the kind of incrementalism that Irish families who are put to the pin of their collar cannot tolerate any longer.

They need help. The Tánaiste, of course, said help is on the way. What that help looks like we do not know. We will know a little more after next week's budget but I predict it will be nowhere near enough to help struggling families meet the demands of a cost-of-living crisis that has now become a permacrisis for far too many across this country. We are, as I say repeatedly, a rich country that unfortunately feels so poor for far too many. The price of energy is at the heart of that.

Leaving aside the delayed development of offshore wind, our so-called moonshot moment, where has that gone? We were supposed to be generating much more offshore wind than we have at the moment. In fact, the targets have remained unmet on at least two or three occasions and the goalposts are shifting all of the time. The answers are there in terms of a renewable and retrofitting revolution but this Government does not have the vision to do that, to wean people off carbon and ensure we have a secure energy supply. In the meantime, we need a windfall tax on the profits of energy companies. The discourse on this is extremely slow. Looking at the Government, you would not think this is a crisis. The Government should know it is a crisis. Its Deputies are meeting the same people we meet and they represent the same people we meet but the Government response is far too slow.

Yesterday, we heard from the energy Commissioner, Dan Jørgensen, that the view at European Commission level seems to be that states should go it alone. The Tánaiste and Minister for Finance, and the Government more generally, should not be using the incrementalism at European level in terms of ECOFIN and so on to delay its response. We need a response in next week's budget. The signal was sent from Jørgensen yesterday that it is up to individual member states to do what they wish on this matter. Indeed, the motion from the Social Democrats makes it very clear that the socialist Government in Portugal has done just that.

11 o'clock

It has introduced a windfall tax on the excess profits of energy companies, which I have no doubt is finding its way into the pockets of low and middle income families in Portugal to assist them through what will be a very difficult winter.

I will say also that it is the case, as usual with the Government and it is a very on brand approach, that it is taking a piecemeal approach and attitude to the difficulties facing households in the country. In recent days, ahead of the budget, we have seen another plethora of mini-announcements from the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, on boiler replacement schemes and support in terms of battery storage for solar. In recent months, we have also seen improvements in the supports for window and door schemes. These are all piecemeal approaches that fail to understand we need a comprehensive approach to this massive challenge facing citizens across the country.

We expected a comprehensive approach would be articulated in the report from the energy affordability task force but we have not seen it. This report is being suppressed and concealed. Last Thursday I said to the Tánaiste on Leaders' Questions that it would be good to see the

report published. It was due to be published in the third quarter of this year, which would have allowed the Government to take a holistic approach to the supports that are needed and to the overall issue of energy generation and energy security in the country. It would also have had the effect of keeping the Opposition honest in terms of what we can feasibly do in our alternative costed proposals to assist families who are in difficulties. The Government decided not to do this and this is outrageous. We need an evidence-based approach to how we tackle this fundamental issue for Irish society and the Irish economy, from the point of view of a real just transition to give some comfort and assurance to families throughout the country. When will this report be published? We need this information. Irish households need it now. We cannot have another piecemeal approach to this issue in the budget. We need a holistic response that will matter in a meaningful way to people who need the support most.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: The ESB made €377 million in the first half of 2026 while the Irish households that we all represent had to choose between heating and eating. This is a 20% increase in the past year. To be honest, it is completely abnormal and unacceptable. If the European Commission is not going to act on this then we, as a body politic, need to act here in Ireland. We need to tax these profits and redirect them to struggling households through targeted energy credits, a fund to help people who are in arrears and expanding retrofitting and solar. The Commissioner was very clear yesterday when he said member states have the power to act. Many EU member states have done so, as my colleague Deputy Nash, has outlined. The Commissioner said that a common EU approach is more complicated. This is why there must be no more excuses for the Government for its failure to act on this.

Last Thursday the Tánaiste said the Government has a plan on energy affordability. He also said that it has the energy task force report but he could not say when it will be published. I presume it will not be published because it will slap the Government on the wrist for what it has not done on energy affordability. If this feels like Groundhog Day it is because it is Groundhog Day. We are effectively in the same position as we were when Putin first invaded Ukraine in 2022.

If we imposed a windfall tax on the grotesque profits of these energy companies, we could pay for the retrofitting revolution we need. There is no point in having a boiler scrappage scheme if people cannot afford to turn on the boiler. The CEO of ESB got €161,000 of a pay increase. This is grotesque when we look at the profits it is making and the price increases it is passing on to Irish consumers, and when we look at the fact that ordinary PAYE workers, particularly public sector workers, are going out on strike. The profits these energy companies are making off the misery and hardship of the people we all represent is completely unacceptable and it is high time the Government reined them in.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Families throughout the country are experiencing a severe cost-of-living crisis. In the teeth of this crisis, the Government withdrew all cost-of-living supports this year, leaving families as much as €1,400 worse off. The Government must now introduce a windfall profits tax on energy companies and price caps on petrol, diesel, home heating oil, electricity and gas to support families with the cost of energy. We already have the highest retail electricity prices in Europe at €480 a year more than our European neighbours. Now, eight companies have told us they will further increase prices in the coming period. The cost of 1,000 litres of home heating oil is now €1,600, which is up €600 on last year, and 500,000

households are in arrears on their electricity and gas bills. In 2023 the Government introduced a windfall profits tax on energy companies and a cap on market revenue which brought in €456 million. The same should happen now.

Energy companies are making huge profits. The eight largest oil companies, for instance, made \$93 billion profit in three months. ESB made €445 million in the first six months of this year, Energia made €70 million in the second quarter of this year and Bord Gais recorded profits of €50 million in the first half of 2026. Energy companies are making bumper profits with gold-plated salaries for executives. We must follow the lead of Portugal, which has already introduced a windfall profits tax. Germany, Spain, Italy, Poland and Austria are also moving in the same direction. Hard-pressed families need a break and the Government should use the proceeds of the windfall profits tax to give them a break and introduce an energy credit of €500.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this motion and we are happy to support it. I have to be honest and say we would go a little bit further with our windfall tax. We think 50% of the profits of these companies should be taxed and this could raise €1.1 billion, which would go a hell of a long way, along with a levy on the data centres to make them pay the same electricity prices ordinary householders. In total this could raise about €2.5 billion and could go a hell of a long way to stopping the energy poverty, hardship and suffering of so many people this winter as a result, let us not forget, of Trump and Israel's warmongering, the profiteering of energy companies and the indifference of our Government and other governments to the hardship and suffering that ordinary people go through.

It is not just that 500,000 people are in arrears and cannot afford to pay their bills, or that older people and the students who will be marching tomorrow will be shivering with cold and afraid to turn on the heat. This leads to excess deaths. It is estimated that between 1,500 and 2,800 people, mostly elderly people and vulnerable people, will die because of energy poverty this winter and because of being afraid to turn on the heating or not being able to afford to do so. There are very real and terrible consequences of the prioritisation of the profits of energy companies and the obscene salaries of their CEOs over providing protection for people who are struggling, including elderly people, students and working people, who cannot afford to pay their bills. It is outrageous and insulting.

The global profits of SSE Airtricity last year were €1.8 billion. The profits of Energia Group this year are up 25% on last year. ESB's profits are up to €445 million for the half year and will be close to a little under €1 billion for the year. The ESB chief executive is going to see a hike in his salary of €90,000, taking it up to €400,000, while people will shiver with cold and some will die because the Government will not prioritise their need for heat over the profits and salaries of those running energy companies. It is disgusting.

I ask the Government to change its priorities, tax these profiteering companies and provide help for ordinary people by controlling the cost of the electricity and energy they use to stop the suffering.

Deputy Charles Ward: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this motion. It is very important. We are now dealing with a cost-of-living crisis that has gone on for years. While it has been going on, we have had electricity companies profiteering and the country has

been awash with money, but the people on the ground are suffering in a way that has never been seen before while the companies profit off their misery. One in seven households is now in electricity arrears. That figure is not going to come down. If anything, it is going to go up. It is very reflective of the homelessness crisis we have in this country, where it has become acceptable and is becoming more acceptable the deeper we come into this. Right now, families in this country are living in misery, afraid to switch on their electricity.

Dealing with this, I have seen first hand households impacted by defective concrete that are significantly worse off because they are trying to heat a house that costs 30% more because it is basically cracked. People cannot keep heat in them. They are in direct poverty as a result of failed Government policy. This continues.

In County Donegal alone, the cost of heating oil is 50% dearer than it was last year. Equally, the cost of electricity in one year in this country has gone up by nearly 76.9% compared with what it was last year. Energy companies are being allowed to profit from the misery of the public. Everybody goes into their constituencies and hears the stories and hears about the poverty. It is vital now that the Government starts to do something decent for once and addresses this issue because it is not going to get better but worse. People are suffering. The Government has a responsibility to look after these people.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this motion. What does it tell us about the sort of society and economy we live in that while most people are really suffering, with over 300,000 people in arrears and almost half of parents saying they are struggling to put adequate food on the table for their children, the electricity companies are making record profits? It tells us that the cost-of-living crisis is not a crisis for everyone. In fact, it is an opportunity for those at the top. The cost-of-living crisis, like the housing crisis and the health crisis, is really a robbery of ordinary working-class people and a transfer of wealth from the many to the few. That is what the cost-of-living crisis is about. How can we have record profits in electricity company after electricity company when people are struggling to afford electricity unless something is fundamentally wrong in how the whole society and economy is based? What is being prioritised are these companies' profits and not the needs of people to light and heat their homes and so on.

In 2023, under pressure from us and others, the Government did introduce a windfall tax. It was an inadequate tax and did not go far enough, but it raised nearly €500 million. It was then abolished. The record profits, however, have continued and have now accelerated in the context of Trump's imperialist wars in the Middle East. We have gone from having the cheapest electricity in Europe to having the most expensive electricity. The motion makes the point that on average Irish households pay almost €500 more than their counterparts across the EU. How on earth did that happen? The answer is simple. It is liberalisation. The privatisation and marketisation of our electricity system is the reason we are paying so much for electricity.

In the meeting of the artificial intelligence committee yesterday, I asked the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, CRU, if it thinks it is fair that ordinary householders pay twice as much per unit of electricity as data centres pay. The people struggling with the cost-of-living crisis are paying twice as much as those making massive profits, including some of the biggest corporations in the world. The answer was that this is liberalisation. It is yet another reason to oppose liberalisation, which has meant that prices have been going up for people and a slow

and not a rapid energy transition. It means that the ESB, for example, which made almost €400 million in profits in the first half of this year, cannot legally use that money to reduce prices for ordinary people because it is set up on a for-profit, commercial mandate where it has to pretend it is just another private company operating in the market on a for-profit basis.

We need windfall taxes and price controls, but what we fundamentally need to do is to reverse the process of liberalisation and privatisation. We need to reconstitute the ESB on a not-for-profit basis and renationalise the energy system so we can prioritise a rapid transition to renewable energy and provide affordable electricity for ordinary householders.

Deputy Michael Collins: There is no doubt that families are under serious pressure from energy costs. Electricity and gas bills remain far too high and hundreds of thousands of households are now in arrears. According to the CRU, over 500,000 energy accounts are in arrears. We now have around 200,000 children in this country living below the poverty line, with this figure rising to some 260,000 children when housing costs are taken into account. Barnardos is seeing families cutting back on food, heat and electricity. In a wealthy country like Ireland, that is simply unacceptable. Barnardos' own 2026 cost-of-living research found that one in five parents said that they or their children had to cut back on or had gone without food, while 36% of families surveyed had fallen into energy bill arrears at some point during the previous year.

We can talk all day about windfall profits, but there are disabled people in Ireland going without heat because they cannot afford the bill. According to the Disability Federation of Ireland, almost one in five disabled people went without heating at some point last year. Any money raised from the energy sector should prioritise those households that simply cannot reduce their energy use without damaging their health and quality of life. We in Independent Ireland have consistently argued that when energy companies make exceptional windfall profits during a crisis, those gains should be returned to the people struggling to pay their bills. Ireland has used a windfall contribution and a market revenue cap before, so there is merit in examining their reintroduction and directing the proceeds towards households.

We also cannot ignore the taxes imposed by the State itself. If the Government is serious about reducing energy costs, it must look at the carbon tax and fuel taxes as well. We are talking here about solar energy and that should be the way to go. A family relying on solar energy, however, would need to invest huge sums of money and the grants are scandalous. Paltry amounts are given here in solar grants compared with other European countries. The Government will have to concentrate on this aspect in the budget next week. It will be very interesting if that is the road the Government is going to take.

I was at the meeting last Sunday in Moate with thousands of others. We have to drop the carbon tax in relation to production and delivery. The question is where we will find the money. It is very easy for me to be over here saying drop everything. We should, though, put the tax on aviation. Most people do not need to fly, but they most certainly do have to go to school or work in the morning. One other issue to mention is the Barryroe oilfield. We should be out there drilling, supplying our own fuel and achieving our own energy security, and we are failing to do so.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: The reason we are in this situation in this country is that the last Government, of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party, signed up to a climate target in Europe that was unachievable. Where are the Greens today? They are not here. One Deputy is what is left. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, however, signed up to that unrealistic climate target which is putting everybody in this country now in the predicament that we are in.

The Tánaiste was on the television yesterday saying that people are saying that the carbon tax cannot be abolished. Under the European ruling they agreed to, he is right. It cannot be abolished, but a fixed tax price can be achieved when we see what has been done in other countries. Let us look at Malta and Poland. All the European countries have a tax base doing different things from what we are doing. In Europe, it is said that it is necessary to charge the minimum amount of tax when it comes to energy. The Government is charging the maximum amount of tax because it is using a percentage model. Every time we get a shock in fuel costs, 50% of the price increase is tax. That is the Government's fault for putting that on the people of Ireland. If it applied a fixed price tax, running from budget to budget, it would have the same tax revenue from fuel that it had last year and the year before on a fixed tax price. If there were any increase, the person would have to pay that increased price, but it would be 50% less than what the Government is charging above €1.70.

I have been explaining this to the Government. I have talked to economists about this. I have talked to people in Europe about this. I was in Dublin Castle last week co-chairing an event as part of the European Presidency.

I spoke to other delegates who said it was common sense. Why can our Government not see that it could help everyone in this country by imposing a fixed tax price on petrol and diesel and a second measure for the agriculture industry which is producing food? There should be a no tax policy on that sector at a time of crisis. That is all I am asking. The Government cannot see that. It is putting everyone here at risk and into poverty.

Deputy Paul Lawless: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. The principle is very simple. If a company is making supernatural profits as a result of war and the design of the market, those profits should return to consumers. The profits are certainly there. Let us consider the ESB, which achieved some €440 million in pre-tax profits this year alone, an increase of €100 million. In the same breath, we learn that the salary of the chief executive of the ESB could rise by €161,000 - €90,000 of the pay rise has already been signed off on by the Government. The salary for one individual in the ESB could rise to €410,000. That is extraordinary. It is not just the ESB. Energia made profits of €70 million in a single quarter, an increase of 25%. Bord Gáis made €50 million in six months. The profits are rolling across the sector. The salaries are rolling, in particular in the ESB.

We have an extraordinary situation whereby we have record profits at the top and record arrears at the bottom. Ordinary families at the bottom are suffering. One in seven households across this State are struggling with electricity bills. That tells us everything we need to know. It is absolutely scandalous that at the top of the chain we see supernatural profits. That is, in part, due to market design. The price of electricity is not set by the cost of making electricity. Rather, it is set by the most expensive plant in terms of the auction system and that is generally always gas. When the price of gas goes through the roof, wind farms and solar operators are paid the same sky-high price, even though the cost of wind and sun did not change and has not

changed. That is the windfall we speak of. That is why we need to move to address it. It is no longer good enough to blame the European Union. We need to take measures ourselves.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: We know that some of the energy price rises are due to international factors beyond our control. It is a bit like a broken record at this stage. As my predecessor said, we know that because the electricity market operates on a system of marginal pricing and the most expensive form of power needed to meet demand at a given moment sets the price for 100% of the market. Right now, we know that is gas. I mentioned that our reliance on data centres and encouragement of them at a time when they are pushing up to almost maximum grid capacity means that will feed more gas into the system and everyone will pay a higher price as a result.

While data centres give a lot in local rates to county councils, they are still not paying their fair share. That is why I support the motion. There needs to be a dividend for hard-pressed consumers from companies making excessive super profits and the energy and electricity companies which, as others have mentioned, are making way too much at a time when everyone else is stuck to the pin of their collar. In that context, we need to be real.

I disagree with my Independent Ireland colleague who said the carbon targets are way above what we can actually meet. We should go even further and be a leader in Europe. We have that potential in terms of mass battery storage and conversion to green hydrogen and private wires, which I have been banging on about for years. We have the potential to be a net exporter of energy and gain huge revenue. We would then be able to get revenue from data companies because we would have spare capacity. We need massive investment, and borrow if we need to, in order to do that. Unfortunately, we do not have the vision. We are dealing with crisis management at a time when international factors are at play. We need to look at the bigger picture more quickly.

Deputy Michael Cahill: There is no doubt that households and businesses are under enormous pressure from rising energy costs. Wholesale electricity prices increased by almost 10% in August alone, significantly higher than they were a year ago. The international situation, in particular the conflict in the Middle East, is having a direct impact on global energy markets and, ultimately, consumers in Ireland.

The Government has already put significant supports in place. The 9% VAT rate on gas and electricity has been extended. The fuel allowance has increased to €38 per week. Eligibility for the working family payment has been expanded. The fuel allowance season was extended by four weeks this year. There has also been substantial investment in energy efficiency. Budget 2026 provided a record €660 million for retrofitting, while more than 287,000 houses have received energy upgrades since 2019.

We cannot be complacent. The issue raised by the Social Democrats is a legitimate one. When energy companies are benefiting from extraordinary market conditions, we need to examine whether the State is capturing an appropriate share of these gains and whether they can be used to protect consumers. Ireland has already demonstrated that such mechanisms can raise significant revenue. The previous temporary solidarity contribution and market revenue cap raised a combined €456 million.

At the same time, we have to be careful about the design of any new measure. Ireland operates in the interconnected European electricity market and the position of the Government is that a co-ordinated EU approach would provide a more effective and level playing field than individual member states acting separately. As a Government backbench TD, I believe it is important that we continue to keep every available option under review, including mechanisms to address extraordinary profits where they arise. The national energy affordability task force is currently working on an energy affordability action plan and the Government has indicated that further decisions will also form part of the Government 2027 process.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I too support the motion. Families across Ireland are at breaking point with the cost of fuel and all of the taxes. Households struggle to pay bills. There are higher energy costs and a carbon tax. It is an injustice. At a time when exceptional profits arise from extraordinary market conditions rather than increasing productivity or investment, it is reasonable that the State provides some kind of fair contribution to the ordinary people.

I live in the lush land of south Tipperary where we make Bulmers cider. My late father and many other farmers planted apples in the sixties. In October, or a day or two before, there would be a large windfall of apples. We picked the windfalls the day after as young boys and girls and brought a trailer of apples to Clonmel to make lovely cider. A windfall tax is only logical to put some money back in people's pockets and be reasonable.

Large data centres are using energy. Someone said they pay a lot of rates, and they do, but there is no fairness and balance. We need a windfall tax to bring back some fairness at a time when people make money from extraordinary events, rather than due to their own business acumen, productivity or anything else. The Government is raking it in with taxes. It is time to play fair with the Irish people, who are fair and fine people and want a modicum of support and respect. This is an ideal opportunity and is something the Government could do to put some money back in people's pockets. What is in their pockets is already spent. People will use their money wisely in the economy.

Deputy Barry Heneghan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta Whitmore agus leis na Daonlathaithe Sóisialta as an rún seo a chur chun tosaigh. Tá sé an-tábhachtach go mbíonn go leor cainte faoi chúrsaí fuinnimh sa Teach seo. Tá a fhios ag an Aire Stáit go bhfuil mé an-ghnóthach sa réimse seo.

I understand the intention and I thank Deputy Whitmore and the Social Democrats. Bringing this to the House is what we should be doing. We need to speak about everything to do with energy and what we can be doing. I know from listening to Deputy Whitmore at the committee that she is solution focused.

I welcome my engagement with the Minister and what the Independents are pushing for. We want lower bills and, of course, we also need to introduce an emergency measure that copies what we did in 2022, which is the right way to achieve that. From the negotiations, the legal basis on which the Minister of State is arguing needs to be examined.

We had the EU Commissioner in yesterday. I understand we must avoid unintended consequences for investment but we also need to look at other things we can do with taxation. I welcome my engagement with the Department and internally regarding energy in battery

storage, plug-in solar and my Bill on private wires. I look forward to working with the Government in alleviating and allowing large energy users, LEUs, to supply their own energy more easily.

We need to look at energy sharing in communities and establishing more DSOs across the network and focus on how other countries have solved the problem. At present, we have an issue where we have one sheriff in town when we could have hundreds like Germany where there is a single person responsible who can say, "This town needs more gas. This town needs more storage." We should have a single officer in those areas who can establish and lower the costs.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I thank the Social Democrats for giving us the time to discuss this very important matter here this morning. The cost of electricity and fuel continues to increase and families are struggling to manage. Indeed, one in seven households is in arrears. Every day people are being encouraged by this Government, and indeed the previous one, to go electric but there is no regulation and no sign of the regulator at all and it has been mentioned here several times. Where has the regulator gone? Is it hiding? What is the matter?

These electricity companies are making massive profits on the backs of customers and the Government is directly responsible for ensuring that does not happen. Yes, the idea or notion of a windfall tax is grand and is going in the right way but companies should not be making this windfall because it is hurting many people. Government is advising people to go electric and is tempting them now to get rid of their boiler with a €2,000 grant but it is not telling them how much it will cost to put in the heat pump. How much will they get towards that?

Every day since Bord na Móna closed down, the cost of electricity has gone up, and the Government must recognise that. These so-called energy grants from the SEAI, such as the warmer homes scheme and the grant for those on fuel allowance, are taking a year and half to materialise. Then, the SEAI invariably comes back to tell people they will not qualify. That is very wrong, and the Minister of State is not addressing that, even though it has been raised here before.

The cost of electricity is exorbitant and the Government is letting the electricity companies get away with it. Where is the regulator? I am asking the Minister of State to find it and get it to do its job because people are being paralysed by the cost of electricity.

Deputy Albert Dolan: I read in the *Business Post* that Europe has spent over €100 billion extra on energy this year since the start of the Iran War, and that is just in a European context. That is the amount of money that has been spent on energy, with no extra energy really delivered. That figure is just the increase in what Europeans have had to pay across the board. Somebody is definitely profiting, so there has to be consideration given to windfall taxes. Maybe that consideration has to be given at a European level, although I am not sure if that is the best way to implement it.

I want to briefly have a conversation this morning about what I am seeing on the ground in east Galway with solar developments. Solar has huge potential, and we have massive amounts of marginal land in the west of Ireland that could be used for solar. However, the problem is

that the way in which these developers are engaging with communities is absolutely shocking. They are disrupting rural communities and are not having a fair engagement process.

I will give one example. In Lackagh, County Galway, a leaflet was recently dropped which proposed a 240-acre solar farm. There was subsequently a community engagement evening on the Wednesday night, where everyone met with the company and were told it would be going for planning in November and December but on the Friday, the company put up the planning notices, submitted the application and now that community has no idea what is going on. It had no consultation and no engagement. We need clear, solar planning guidelines for rural communities so that people know what it means, what is happening and that there is no unfair planning process imposed upon them.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan): I thank Deputies for raising these important matters and I welcome the opportunity to discuss the pressures households are facing as a result of high energy costs.

As has been clearly articulated by the International Energy Agency, this is a global problem which is causing significant price increases and disruption across the world. The Government is taking action to help households and businesses with the cost of fuel and energy, and it has been proactive in introducing support measures on fossil fuel costs and supports for the transport, farming and fisheries sectors. This is in addition to the range of measures in budget 2026 aimed at helping households with energy costs, which included extending the reduced VAT rate on gas and electricity; enhanced social protection payments; and record funding for SEAI retrofit schemes.

As outlined, there has been significant funding made available for retrofit schemes, and there has been an increased number of applications. The benefit of even simple upgrades like attic insulation and cavity wall or external wall insulation cannot be dismissed. They can improve the warmth and comfort of the home, while reducing energy costs at the same time. Yesterday, Government approval was granted to expand the range of supports we offer to households. These are new storage grants, which are now available, as well as easier pathways for warmer homes and households in RAS tenancies to access retrofitting supports. Every single one of these changes is designed to make it easier for more households to access retrofitting measures.

The Minister, Deputy O'Brien, has engaged with energy suppliers and the energy regulator to ensure consumers, particularly vulnerable customers, are protected. The CRU has a wide range of protections in place for customers experiencing difficulties in paying their bills. Each year, the CRU carries out the a on effectiveness of customer protection measures over the past winter as well as deciding the measures to be retained for the forthcoming winter. Some of the key measures that remained in place in recent years included a disconnection moratorium, reduced debt repayments and discounted tariffs for customers on financial hardship meters. The CRU will publish measures in the coming weeks ahead of this winter. Anyone who is struggling with their bill is strongly encouraged to engage with their supplier. Suppliers will not disconnect customers who engage with them. It is also important to note that switching supplier or plan could save the average electricity customer hundreds of euro on annual electricity bills, and I strongly encourage consumers to seek out the best prices available.

With regard to high energy prices, there are structural factors that are relevant. Ireland is import-dependent for energy, making it particularly vulnerable for price volatility in the wholesale gas market. Ireland's isolated island location, low levels of interconnection, widely dispersed low density population and reliance on fossil fuels are also important price determinants.

Energy is central to every social and economic activity in Ireland but we remain too dependent on imported fossil fuels. The energy crisis caused by the conflict in the Middle East highlights that we must reduce our reliance on imported fossil fuels and develop our own energy security and strength. As an island nation with limited fossil fuel reserves, this means developing our own abundant renewable energy resources and deepening our interconnection with trusted European peers. The national energy affordability task force has been established by Government to identify, assess and implement measures that will enhance energy affordability for households and businesses, while delivering key renewable commitments and protecting security of supply and economic stability.

The first report of the task force published last November set out measures for consideration in the budget 2026 process. The task force is working intensively on an energy affordability action plan which will be submitted to Government in the coming weeks. The energy affordability action plan includes the identification of measures such as a market revenue cap, which in a previous form was based on the 2022 EU Council Regulation 2022/1854, while recognising we have not experienced the extreme price escalation that followed the Russian invasion of Ukraine and our EU partners have not introduced either a market revenue cap or a temporary solidarity contribution.

Ireland will engage constructively on the development of proposals from the Commission on a potential EU-wide windfall tax or levy if such proposals are brought forward.

Governments across Europe are rightly attentive to developments in energy markets and their impact on households, businesses and the wider economy. The topic of windfall taxes was discussed by ministers at the recent informal ECOFIN meeting in Dublin. The Commission took note of the discussions and was asked to report back to ministers at the October meeting. The Government will continue to actively monitor the current geopolitical situation and the impact on energy markets and remains ready to respond as circumstances evolve. The best long-term approach for Ireland to insulate consumers from volatility on international wholesale energy markets is to invest in energy efficiency and renewable energy. Cutting our dependence on fossil fuels and generating power from our renewable energy sources will ensure a cleaner, cheaper energy future in the longer term.

There has been a lot of constructive debate around solar in particular. I know the Social Democrats, and Deputy Whitmore in particular, are quite passionate about it. Solar is a key aspect of how we can reduce emissions, reduce costs for households and help business to survive. I will touch on the challenge the farming sector in particular has experienced in relation to access to the TAMS grant. Thousands of farmers across Ireland are more than willing to put rooftop solar on their farm buildings with the intention of reducing their emissions, but just as important for them is reducing the costs of farming and doing business. This was a clear feature over the summer and many farmer lobby groups want greater access to solar for farmers. I would of course love to see it in budget 2027. Apparently, around 90% of farmers who sought TAMS support to install solar on their rooftops were turned down. That

needs to be investigated for our farming sector, which plays such a key role in food security, rural business and keeping rural economies going. Clearly, they want to play their part. I wanted to make that comment because solar featured prominently in a lot of the contributions.

I thank Deputies from across the House for their contributions. However, I do not accept the motion and I push the Government's countermotion in its place.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: I thank my colleague, Deputy Whitmore, for leading on this Private Members' business and for all the work she does in this area. I also thank everyone who contributed to the debate.

I find the Minister of State's contribution and the position of the Government extraordinary. The Government keeps saying this is up to the European Union and if something comes from the Commission, the Irish Government will look at it and so forth. That is despite, as has been pointed out, the Commissioner saying the Commission will not do this but countries can do it themselves and bring forward proposals in accordance with EU law. The Government has been putting the ball into the EU's court, the EU has kicked it back and the Government is left with no response at all. The responsibility is clearly on the Irish Government to do something. This happens on a lot of issues, in that the Government does not act and says instead that the European Union might do something or the European Union is stopping us from doing it. That is irresponsible because, ultimately, that kind of narrative can lead to growing Euroscepticism, which we should all push strongly back against.

On what the Minister of State said about solar, if one goes to farms in other countries, on every single farm building one will see solar. What is it other European countries have that we do not have which enables them to do this? Perhaps strong political leadership is the missing thing. I do not think it is the farmers. Irish farmers are as supportive of renewables and pushing solar as any other area, as the Minister of State acknowledged.

We are talking here about super-profits and extra profits - profits that were never anticipated or expected. A windfall tax on profits that were never expected or anticipated is an entirely just proposition. We would claw back those profits for measures such rolling out more solar and helping people on lower incomes and farmers in rural areas transition to more renewables, which are really good objectives. This would create more funding for that. It would also have the effect of creating an incentive for energy companies to push down their prices because if they know their excess profits will be clawed back by the State, they will not have an incentive for higher profits. There is no justification at all for the Government's inaction on this. It is a constructive proposal. It has been done before. It can and should be done. We urge the Government at this late stage to adopt our proposal for this windfall tax.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I thank my colleague Deputy Whitmore for her excellent work on this. As an overall summary, having sat here for the entire debate, the contempt and disrespect shown by the Government benches with regard to a fully costed and evidenced proposal is quite baffling. The Minister of State just said he encourages people to talk to their suppliers as if that will achieve something, while the CEOs are sitting there laughing at us with the profits they are making. It is just baffling.

There is a perception that this Government continues to pick the wrong side, namely, the side of big business, profits and greed, all at the expense of the taxpayer. The merits of the motion are clear and simple and would do untold good for the hundreds of thousands of people in energy arrears and the people now facing into another winter of choosing whether to eat or heat while providers sit back and laugh at us. The Government has to pick a different side now. The Minister of State can list off the record levels of investment in social protection, the fivers here and tenners there that leave no legacy or the free school this and free school that. That is simply giving people back their money while, simultaneously, the Government chooses to muddy the waters with referrals to the EU just to keep telling itself it is on the side of people. In parallel, the Government gives the sly nod to CEOs of energy and grocery companies, pension funds, data centres and developers. It is a case of "Do not worry lads; we will sort you out". The social contract I was raised with promised me that if I worked hard, put my head down and contributed positively to my community, I would be able to provide the basics for me and my family - to heat and eat. The Government has rewritten that social contract without telling anybody because all of that does not matter any more.

I have visions of the Government telling itself in Cabinet that it should put the squeeze on now so it can give it back ahead of the next election, that is should pull the plaster now and ignore the reality at a time of record budgetary surplus because it thinks it will pay off in the long run as it drip-feeds announcements of minimal increases in years four and five of this cycle. This will then appear to show the people that the Government is listening to them on the problems it itself has created. It is clear the Government has already picked its side. It will knock on the doors, go on the radio and television and say all the rights things, only to do the opposite the minute it has a portfolio to protect or a CEO to impress. "We cannot do it all in one budget", it will say. If it picked the side of the people who are scared to turn on the heating, plug in the heater, light a fire or get a fill of oil, who cannot afford to install solar and who go around the shop with a calculator in their hands, desperately concerned about going over budget while international supermarket chains lap up windfall profits. If the Government picked the side of those people and chose to do good instead of waiting, this proposal would be considered.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: We are entering into a winter of discontent. Life has never been so expensive, whether it is electricity, gas, home heating oil, fuel or groceries. People are struggling to keep their heads above water.

I am particularly supportive of the solar measures that are being brought in but they are clearly not enough. More has to be done.

This is not just about energy. I think this is what the Minister of State is missing. It is not just about costs. This is about fairness. The Irish people have an innate appreciation of fairness. If they believe something is not fair, it really goes against the grain. What we are seeing here is that the Government's approach is not fair. People are struggling. An elderly man in my constituency has been threatened with disconnection. I raised his issue in the Dáil yesterday. It is not fair that he is going through that and at the same time we have large energy corporations the Government is refusing to tax properly. It is not just the normal taxation, they are making super profits, extraordinary profits that they could never have envisaged, and the Government is refusing to ask them to play their part, to do their bit, yet it expects individuals to do it.

When we have fuel protests and people are lined up on the roads again, the Minister of State must understand that is actually at the core of what is happening. People know that this Government is prioritising large corporates - large energy companies and data centres - and that they are the ones who are making money and the people who are suffering, who are being disadvantaged, and who are bearing the brunt of the energy crises that they have no part in are individuals, lone parents, retirees and pensioners. They are people who are really struggling and they need to know that this Government has their back; that it will support them and it will bring a level of fairness into this debate.

Instead of saying the EU has ruled out an EU-wide energy windfall tax, which is what has happened, or saying the Government agrees with this motion, it will support it and it will bring in a national windfall tax so that no one - no corporation, no large entity, no large business - is essentially making money off the backs of people who cannot afford it, it is closing its eyes to it. From a social solidarity and cohesiveness perspective, it is making a huge mistake. People need support. They need the Government to have their back and it does not have it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is the amendment agreed to?

Deputies: It is not agreed.

Amendment put.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: In accordance with Standing Order 85(2), the division is postponed until the weekly division time this evening.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 11.54 a.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 12 meán lae.

Sitting suspended at 11.54 a.m. and resumed at 12 noon.

12 o'clock

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Tá tuismitheoirí trína chéile mar gheall ar an gcur chuige atá beartaithe don fhiosrú ar Shláinte Leanaí Éireann. Ní mór don Rialtas gníomhú chun dul i ngleic lena gcuid imní agus chun a chinntiú go bhfaigheann an fiosrúchán na freagraí atá de dhíth.

For years, we have heard the harrowing stories of children with scoliosis and spina bifida; children who were failed catastrophically by Children's Health Ireland, CHI, and by the health system prior to the establishment of that organisation, left waiting for operations that could change their lives, living with the fear of becoming inoperable; children who had their hips operated on unnecessarily. They were profoundly failed by the State and successive Governments.

Parents have fought a long and hard battle for answers. They fought for accountability, and yet they were stonewalled at every turn. It took the death of nine-year-old Harvey Morrison Sherratt for the Government to move on an inquiry. Following meetings with Harvey's parents,

Gillian and Stephen, the Tánaiste, Simon Harris, and the health Minister, Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, promised an inquiry that would be child centred to provide parents with answers and to deliver accountability.

On Monday, Remy Farrell published his report on CHI and the recommendations for that proposed inquiry and parents feel that they still have not been heard. They are back to square one. They are angry because the period to be covered by the inquiry will have a starting point of 1 January 2019, but the failures of children did not begin on that date. Indeed, they long predated the establishment of CHI.

In fact, Simon Harris made his now infamous promise back in 2017 because at that stage we already had a crisis. He said at that time that no child would wait longer than four months for spinal surgery. Of course, that promise came to nothing and meant nothing as children continued to suffer, so it is not acceptable that an examination of those early years would be excluded from the inquiry because it means that people who are now adults and suffered greatly as children while waiting for treatment before 2019 will be deliberately cut out of that inquiry. That is just wrong.

Parents are also upset that there will not be a detailed investigation into individual circumstances and the treatment of affected children. Instead, the focus will be exclusively on systemic problems. So, the question is: how will this inquiry provide parents with the truth about how their child was failed? For this inquiry to have the confidence of parents, it has to be a process that identifies all failures, including individual failures.

There is also real concern that the majority of the proposed commission of investigation will be held behind closed doors. Of course, some parents will want to give their testimony in private and that has to be respected and accommodated, but remember, many parents are done with closed doors. They were forced to share their children's suffering very publicly, so they want to give their testimony in public, and they want the accountability to be public too.

Does the Taoiseach understand why parents feel so badly let down? Does he recognise and accept that the starting point of 1 January 2019 is totally wrong? Can he tell parents today what he will now do to ensure that this inquiry provides them with the answers they need?

The Taoiseach: First, I would like to offer my deep condolences and those of the Government and the entire team here at the Oireachtas on last night's very sad passing of our colleague and friend Seamus Carroll, husband of another colleague, Treasa Carroll. Seamus was a very respected member of the usher team and there will be a strong sense of shock and upset among the team throughout the House today. We think of him and pray for him, Treasa and his entire family at this very sad time. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta as an gceist seo a ardú os comhair na Dála inniu. Aontaím léi go bhfuil géarghá ann fiosrú cuimsitheach a chur i bhfeidhm agus a thosú maidir leis an méid a tharla laistigh de CHI chun soiléiriú a fháil ar an gceist iomlán. First, I agree that we need a statutory inquiry in relation to the pediatric services at CHI and particularly following the scoping report, Report on Children's Health Ireland Inquiry into Spina Bifida and Complex Scoliosis Scoping Exercise, that the Government and the Minister, Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, published on 29 September.

The issues are very serious, and the parents and many others have strongly advocated for an inquiry. My view is that Remy Farrell SC did a comprehensive piece of work in respect of the scoping inquiry. Officials in the Department of Health will now work closely with the Office of the Attorney General on drafting the terms of reference. There will be a call for input from advocacy groups to the terms of reference, and the final terms of reference will then be submitted to the Government for approval.

In respect of a number of issues the Deputy has raised, as she knows, Mr. Farrell recommends a commission of investigation, which is statutory and mandatory and has compellability and all of the core requirements of a statutory public inquiry as per the Act. He has defined four modules: waiting lists, spinal surgery, hip dysplasia and the cohort of children who were not transferred to Temple Street post 2008. There are then two submodules recommended for the module on waiting lists: a personal family statement module and a module on the response of CHI management to waiting list issues.

Mr. Farrell also recommends that the commission inquire into whether the management of CHI was aware of the use or intended use of the non-CE marked springs and surgeries undertaken at Temple Street by consultant A between 2020 and 2022. There is further work in terms of the hip dysplasia and, as I said, children who were not transferred to Temple Street.

One important point is that a commission model can deliver the same core statutory powers as a tribunal and is arguably better suited to the specific subject matter of the inquiry, namely the medical treatment of children. The commission can compel witnesses and the production of documents and will obviously publish a final report.

Mr. Farrell came to his conclusions based on the personal and medical information of children. He feels that this model is the optimum model to handle sensitively the personal and medical information of children. He is concerned, as I would be, about the significant risk that children may be identifiable.

Of course, within a commission of inquiry, there is the capacity for public modules, and that is an area where the chairperson clearly has significant discretion. The chairperson could also have discretion in respect of any issues that arise during the course of the discussion that would have a more historical context, pre-2019. That discretion can be provided expressly to the chairperson to utilise his or her discretion to go back.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I too send our best wishes and solidarity to Treasa and all of Seamus's family on his sad loss. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

I spoke to Harvey Morrison Sherratt's mother, Gillian, this morning. This is what she said as regards what is proposed: "It's so far removed from what we were promised and expected that we feel like we're back at day one." That is really worrying and it reflects the reaction of many parents. We need to get to grips with this. I am not questioning the essential model that is proposed. I have questioned the Taoiseach specifically on its point of departure. I have put it to him that 1 January 2019 is not the correct date because these problems, issues and really negative experiences, as well as the promises that were made to parents and children, predate 2019. Why in the name of goodness would the Government take that as its point of departure? In the terms of reference, that needs to be corrected. Second, we need explicit recognition that this will be a public process except where parents choose or wish to give testimony in private.

Those are just two core issues, among others, that parents are advocating for. Above all else, this inquiry has to, I am sure the Taoiseach will agree, enjoy the full confidence of those parents and families.

The Taoiseach: Mr. Farrell has said, and I would agree with this from experience, that inquiries work best when they have a defined scope and time. Any inquiry that is absolutely open-ended or has very broad terms of reference can go on for a very long time and I do not believe that is in the interests of the parents, families or children involved. That is why he suggested 2019 to 2025, inclusive, with 2019 marking the establishment of CHI. It is a six-year period. As I said earlier, discretion will be there for the chairperson if issues arise that predate 2019. The chairperson will have discretion to go back and look at those issues. Again, as I said, there will be a call for public input into this and the Minister will continue to engage. There is an issue here. If it is a statutory public inquiry as per the 1921 Act, there is a danger that some may not participate. Quite a number of parents may not want their children to be publicly identified.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: You should conclude, Taoiseach.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I have acknowledged that.

The Taoiseach: I just-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That has been acknowledged.

The Taoiseach: That is why we opted for a commission-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The year 2019 is the wrong date.

The Taoiseach: On 2019, what I am saying is that the chairperson will be given sole discretion to go beyond or back from that date as issues arise.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: At the outset, on behalf of the Social Democrats, I want to extend our very sincere sympathies to the family and friends of Seamus Carroll and his wife, Treasa. Seamus was someone who, when you met him, you were always left with a smile on your face afterwards. He was a very kind, lovely man and he will be very much missed by all of us.

Ní ceart go mbeadh pinsinéirí na tíre seo i ngreim ag an eagla mar gheall go bhfuil costas ró-ard ar an teas ina dtithe. Ní cóir go mbeadh cúis inní ag pinsinéirí na tíre seo agus iad ag téamh a dtithe nó ag cur bia ar an mbord, go háirithe tar éis an uafáis atá déanta acu don tír seo. We are all beginning to wonder what the point of budget day is given that most of the details have been liberally and very publicly leaked in the media. Throughout this torrent of leaks, one detail has remained notably consistent, that pensioners can only expect to see a €7.50 weekly increase in their pensions. That would be a paltry increase which does not even keep pace with inflation. It would tip a huge number of older people, many of whom are already

barely scraping by, into poverty. A €7.50 increase would be a clear betrayal of pensioners by both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. During the last election, Fianna Fáil and its coalition partners made a firm commitment to increase the State pension to €350 per week over the lifetime of the Government. Fianna Fáil went even further and said that it would increase core social welfare payments by at least €12 per week every year. Does the Taoiseach not realise that pensioners are relying on him to keep his word? The Government broke its promise at the first available opportunity when pensions last year were only increased by €10, and now it looks like it will be betraying pensioners again.

I have been contacted by a huge number of pensioners who are very anxious and upset at what has been reported. They are already finding things very hard. The price of their food shop is going up every other week and their energy bills are through the roof. Many are living in fear of the coming winter because they have no idea how they are going to keep themselves warm. Their budgets are already stretched to the limit and now the Government is preparing to deal them another hammer blow. Pensioners who have worked hard all their lives should be enjoying their retirement. They should not be lying awake at night worrying about how to pay their grocery bills. An increase of €7.50 would be a betrayal and an insult. This Government has announced nearly every other measure in the budget. Can the Taoiseach now confirm that the Government will not short-change pensioners and will it increase pensions by at least €15 a week?

The Taoiseach: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta. Is léir ón méid atá déanta againn go dtí seo an bhliain seo caite agus na blianta roimhe sin go bhfuilimid sásta mar Rialtas an-chuid tacaíocht agus cabhair a thabhairt do phinsinéirí na tíre seo i ngach aon tslí is féidir linn. Táimid chun é sin a dhéanamh arís sa bhuiséad atá le teacht. Tá sé suimiúil go bhfuil an Teachta ag léamh na bpáipéar nuachtáin lá i ndiaidh lae. Caithfidh sé a bheith amhrasach chomh maith. The Deputy should not believe everything he reads in the newspapers or hang his hat on every report. The reports in respect of the old-age pension, I suggest, may not be accurate at all. I worry about the Deputy's decrying of commentary on the budget or briefings and leakage because he was once a person who advocated very strongly for full transparency from the Government in relation to all measures under consideration. I jest.

There will be a lot of briefing, as there always is before budgets, and speculation and so on but the bottom line is that we are conscious of the cost of living. We are conscious of the impact on a whole range of people. If you look at the social protection budget over the last number of years, it has grown exponentially. We are close to a budget of €2 billion. Last year we concentrated on the carer's disregard and the €10 increase in the old-age pension was well above inflation. We also did significant work on child support payments to deal with child poverty. We saw the largest increases on record there, and in the back-to-school clothing allowances. We also extended the free fuel. The Minister is looking at other ways, in addition to the pension, of helping pensioners in the forthcoming budget. He will be bringing forward proposals in that regard on budget day.

What I would say to the Deputy is, do not believe the reports in the newspapers in respect of pensions because they may not turn out to be accurate. Outside of the pensions, other supports that we introduce through social protection, and through taxation for some pensioners, will be very beneficial to them. We believe strongly in a strong social safety network. We believe strongly in supporting pensioners and over the last six years we have demonstrated that

in successive budgets the last Government and this Government have introduced. If you compare our social protection budget with those of comparable member states across the European Union, you will find that we are up there in the top tier of social welfare distribution, the GNI co-efficient and so on. We have a good story to tell in respect of that as a country.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: The leaks on the budget are not coming from the Opposition. They are coming from the Government. Where does the Taoiseach think they are coming from? Where does he think those headlines came from? They have pensioners worried sick. Is this just some sort of cynical ploy to manage expectations so that if the increase is more than €7.50, people are meant to be grateful, even though the Government is breaking its promise of €12? Specifically on the promise that Fianna Fáil gave in the last election, I have the election manifesto here. Does the Taoiseach remember it? It gave, in black and white, a commitment to pensioners of at least a €12 increase in their pension every year that Fianna Fáil is in government.

That is the commitment the Taoiseach gave. He broke it last year. Does he understand that pensioners are relying on him to keep his word? It is not a laughing matter. People are worried sick about how they will make ends meet. Is the Taoiseach going to stick to his word and give a €12 increase, or will he do better by doing what the Social Democrats are proposing, which is to give a €15 increase to pensioners, as provided for in our alternative budget?

The Taoiseach: First, we recognise the enormous pressure on families and pensioners because of the cost-of-living crisis, which was fundamentally brought about by two major wars, namely, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the 2026 Middle East conflict between the United States and Iran, which really has caused ripples across the entire world in terms of energy prices and knock-on effects on the cost of living.

Last year, we took very significant measures in the budget to protect the most vulnerable, including pensioners, and we will do similarly in the forthcoming budget next week. That is across the board in terms of interventions we have made on energy, which benefit pensioners, by the way, just as they do other sectors of the economy, in terms of the core pension itself and in the form of other measures that affect pensioners. We fully understand that they are under pressure, but the entirety of society, particularly low-income groups, is also under a lot of pressure because of the crisis.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: Are you going to stick to your word and give a €12 increase?

The Taoiseach: We will fulfil the programme for Government over the lifetime of this Government. Of that there is no doubt.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: Will you stick to your word?

The Taoiseach: I did not interrupt the Deputy and he should not be interrupting me. There is a very set protocol in here.

The bottom line is this: the Deputy should not be depending on speculation. Budget day will reveal the full intent of the Government's contribution.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Yesterday, the Taoiseach said he was not going to intervene in the Garvaghy Road-Drumcree stand-off, which is potentially set to escalate again this weekend. He dismissed suggestions that he should call on the British Government, the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and, indeed, the PSNI to stop a triumphalist sectarian Orange Order march going down the Garvaghy Road. I ask him to reconsider that non-interventionist position. I want him to ask himself what kind of mentality or ideology would lead Orangemen to want to march through a mostly Catholic area, where they are not wanted and where that march is going to evoke the trauma and memories of more than 21 people being killed, including the Quinn children, Robert Hamill, Rosemary Nelson and many more. The answer is that it is an ideology and mentality of supremacism and the dehumanisation of one section of the population based on their religion.

I put it to the Taoiseach that it is a mentality and ideology very similar to the one on display from, and being led by, Yoseph Haddad, the mouthpiece for the Israeli regime, in the football stadium in Hungary, where he encouraged chants for the IDF, the people who are carrying out a genocide against the Palestinians, and taunting Irish players with racist abuse. It is a similar supremacist and dehumanising ideology and it leads to death and destruction. It is no coincidence that when I went up to Drumcree eight or nine days ago, before all this started, the community centre there was covered in banners in solidarity with Palestine. That is because the people of the Garvaghy Road understand the connection between the dehumanisation they suffer and how colonialism was based on dividing people on religious grounds, setting Catholic against Protestant just like the Zionist movement set Muslim against Christian and Jew, with all the horrific violence that has flowed from that.

It seems to me that as the leader of a country that has suffered colonialism, oppression and all of the divide-and-rule tactics that led to terrible things here, including the Penal Laws, the so-called Famine - in actuality, mass starvation of the population - and all of that, the Taoiseach has a responsibility to stand up against supremacism and the dehumanisation of a section of the population and to call for this march to be stopped because it is a sectarian, supremacist march. He might also intervene to stop Ireland's next match against Israel because we should not be playing against a regime guilty of genocide.

The Taoiseach: First, the Deputy's presentation of what I articulated here yesterday is wrong. I did not say I was not going to intervene in anything. Describing my position as a non-interventionist approach is wrong; it is false. Of course, he has to present his argument in that way to justify his subsequent comments. All political leaders - all of us - have an obligation in terms of this issue to be careful of what we say and how we say it if we want a resolution of it.

I do not accept the Deputy's comparison of what is happening in Gaza to the Northern Ireland of today. The situations are incomparable. The deprivation, the attacks, the killing of 75,000 people in Gaza, the continued stymying of aid going into Gaza - how can he compare that to what is happening in Northern Ireland today? There is no comparison. It is just ridiculous to make that comparison.

Northern Ireland has come a long way since the Good Friday Agreement, in which my party and others were centrally involved. Parity of esteem and respect for different traditions were the hallmark of that agreement. Many parades are held across Northern Ireland without any issues through local agreements and mediation between people who work and live together.

The shared island initiative is breaking new ground in terms of connectivity between North and South, joint projects and programmes between different communities in music, biodiversity, climate and prevention of violence against women - the whole range of programmes we are now funding, with buy-in from all communities and all traditions.

What I said yesterday was that one single intervention cannot resolve this issue. We have to resolve it through a broader lens if we are serious about a future where different traditions can live together on this island and share the island in a reconciled way. Deputy Boyd Barrett has never publicly condemned Hamas for what happened on 7 October 2023. That is his view of life. Equally, he has referenced the PSNI in a negative way today. I want to pay tribute to the PSNI and to the Chief Constable, Jon Boutcher, for the manner in which he is managing this and trying to navigate it. The PSNI has been placed in a very difficult position. Part of the reform under the Good Friday Agreement was to have greater cross-community participation in the PSNI. There is a growing sense of "let's attack the PSNI and undermine the Patten reforms". We have to work to enhance the Patten reforms and ensure the PSNI continues on its journey of being truly cross-community in membership and so on. Progress has been made, but what I have witnessed and listened to in the past four or five days from quite a number of interlocutors is an attempt to undermine that process. We need to be very careful about that because it will end up in a very negative spiral into the future.

The Minister for foreign affairs met with the Secretary of State last evening. There was a series of exploratory talks between various groups and so on. Those talks will continue today. We have made very clear our view on the position of the Parades Commission. We do not agree with that decision, which is incomprehensible. However, we must now focus on a resolution, and talks are ongoing in that respect.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The scale of horror visited on the Palestinians certainly is of a different order. I do not have time to go into the history but saying there is no connection means the Taoiseach needs to look back at the history. After subjugating people in Ireland, the leaders of the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries were sent straight to Palestine. In 1936, the Governor General of Jerusalem, when asked why he was backing Zionism, said it was because he wanted to create "a little loyal Jewish Ulster" in the Middle East. The British exported the model they had used to subjugate and divide Catholic and Protestant in Ireland to do the same in Palestine, with horrific consequences. By the way, it is no coincidence that DUP MP Carla Lockhart was standing out with masked men protesting against a Gaza peace march.

As for Jon Boutcher and the PSNI, how come he had already recruited 200 Scottish police officers last Monday or Tuesday week to come to the Garvaghy Road when, at the same time, he was telling the Parades Commission there would not be a public order consequence if the Orange Order march went down the Garvaghy Road? That suggests that Jon Boutcher misled the Parades Commission, with the consequences we are now facing of a stand-off. The Taoiseach needs to stand up against supremacism and an ideology that is about trying to drag the North back to violent conflict and he should speak up against the genocidal horror of the Israeli regime as well.

The Taoiseach: I agree with the Deputy that we cannot go into history but the Black and Tan model did not work in Ireland. Coming from the county of Cork I know that too well from my history.

In respect of Jon Boucher and the PSNI, his primary objective, which he articulated with great clarity, was that no person would be injured as a result of what transpired over the last number of days from the decisions made by the Parades Commission onwards. That should be acknowledged. The Deputy talks about supremacy. If you speak to the victims of 30 years of violence, what happened in 30 years on this island was horrific. The activities of the Provisional IRA, the Ulster Volunteer Force and paramilitaries from the loyalist side were horrific. He led an inquiry called Kenova. The victims of all of that violence spoke about his integrity, his inclusiveness and the degree to which he responded to the victims and the families of the victims. The Deputy can try to demonise the individual if he likes but I am not going to do that.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I am just asking a question.

The Taoiseach: We need a bit of honesty here if we are going to make any way forward and stop retreating always on all sides, including the Deputy's contribution just now. That will not achieve anything into the future. It fits an ideological frame, but it does not deal with the realities of the here and now and how we move forward. If we want a united Ireland in the future, we have to begin to articulate what that looks like and how we include people.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I also extend my sincere condolences to the family, friends and co-workers of the late Seamus Carroll and especially his wife, Treasa.

Last Sunday, a dignified protest was held across all Twenty-six Counties by women and men seeking a transparent, trauma-informed and trustworthy family court system. Those involved walked a mile in solidarity with people affected by ongoing failures in this deeply flawed system to highlight the damage that has been and is currently being done to children in particular. In some cases, children's shoes were left outside courthouses as a symbol of who is affected most. This is not a legacy issue of abuse. It is one that is ongoing and still hurting children and parents, especially but not exclusively women.

The Taoiseach may be aware of this grassroots campaign. It is called Walk in Our Shoes, and today a group is walking peacefully from the Four Courts to outside these Houses of the Oireachtas. They are walking right now, as far as I understand. They are doing it because the system is not fit for purpose, whether it is the in-camera rule, which allows bad decision-making to be brushed aside, or the over-reliance on so-called experts, some of whom appear to act as paid shills or devotees of a cult rather than focusing on putting the voice of the child first. We then have historical failures by Tusla, which are still going on all over the place. Most recently, we had appalling abuses over 12 years where a proper investigation did not take place because of an over-reliance on cultural sensitivities, among other things.

We had a very good debate last April on my Private Members' motion which called on the Government to replace this outdated, blanket in-camera rule with a controlled transparency framework, while implementing strict regulations on court-appointed experts and strengthening statutory oversight of Tusla. I mentioned that the current in-camera rule forces child custody access and childcare proceedings to happen behind closed doors. It creates a culture of silence that disempowers vulnerable parents and also masks the systemic under-resourcing, groupthink and poor decision-making that go on. This lack of scrutiny has led to

so many children being exposed to emotional harm. Some who are now over the age of 18 are telling their stories but some are still in the system. While Ireland delays its own 2025 review recommendations, we now have jurisdictions like England and Wales, and the pilot in Northern Ireland, where they have transitioned to controlled transparency. Where the in-camera rule has gone, the assumption is that bloggers and journalists can report while also protecting the anonymity of children. We have had meetings with the Minister for justice. Guidelines have been promised on these so-called experts in the court that judges hugely rely on. However, I am worried that we are not going fast enough and that children are still going to be systemically abused because a light is not being shone on poor decisions and in some cases corrupt ones.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. There is no simple answer or response to this. I would have concerns about removing the in-camera rule in the children's court, which the Deputy has advocated for. We always have to protect children and it has to be our first priority in situations like this. That said, we should also be responsive to concerns parents and families may have about how the court system and the children's court work. We are open to engaging with advocates in that respect. There is a need for regulation around court-appointed experts who make submissions. I am aware of some cases that were very negatively impacted as a result of the inputs of some so-called experts, particularly in child custody cases. There have to be sufficient and effective safeguards for that.

We are improving resourcing of our children's court and will continue to do that. I will bring the issues the Deputy has raised to the attention again of the Minister. I know there was a Private Members' debate earlier this year. It is somewhat complex. The Deputy spoke about what he described as the historical failures of Tusla. I tend to take a different perspective on Tusla. It does not do everything perfectly in some respects but without question, if we take State agencies generally, it has probably one of the most complex, sensitive and difficult breadth of issues on its desk. These are not easily resolved and that should be acknowledged. That does not excuse any bad behaviour or poor performance but we have to look at it overall and we have to recruit more people into Tusla. We have to make sure that people in Tusla can reach their objectives of wanting to contribute to society effectively as professionals. I think the desire of the vast majority of people working in Tusla is to provide a good service to children and young people. It is not an easy area to come down on hard and fast. I am not saying the Deputy is suggesting that sort of methodology or approach to dealing with issues.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: The Taoiseach mentioned Tusla. I would be the first to say there are many great people working in Tusla who deserve commendation. Tusla needs to be resourced better and it also needs greater scrutiny, as has been mentioned by other Members of these Houses in various contexts.

I am concerned that the Taoiseach is concerned about the abolition of the in-camera rule because we have to look at best practice. A number of pilot studies were done in the UK. After these, when the abolition was rolled out, it was found that no harm was caused to children and there were no breaches of anonymity. By being able to report, it shines a light on the decision-making process and puts more scrutiny. In any situation where a light is shone on something, it makes people think twice, even in terms of the media reporting on the Houses of the Oireachtas and this debate being televised. Scrutiny is needed at all stages. Groups like the Alliance of Birth Mothers Campaigning for Justice, the Right to Transparency and the Walk in

Our Shoes campaign are consistently advocating for this reform because they see every single day in the courts where children are being hurt. We need to review this and look seriously at how the English and Welsh court systems have moved forward.

The Taoiseach: I will refer the Deputy's comments to the Minister. My instincts are to protect the child at all costs. We should never underestimate the impacts of trauma on a child at an early age in terms of the child's subsequent life journey and that would be my concern. I will be honest with the Deputy and say that I am not aware of the evaluation of the systems in the UK. I am open to looking at that but we need to remember that trauma can have a longer term impact on children. I will discuss this with the Minister for justice and ask him to come back to the Deputy on it.

Ceisteanna ó na Comhaltaí Eile - Other Members' Questions

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I want to express my condolences on the sad passing of a wonderful friend, Seamus Carroll. He was a true gentleman and there is a sense of gloom around the House this morning. I wish his wife and family all the very best.

I also want to mention iarchomhairleoir Seamus O'Donnell from Contae Phort Láirge.

The Chief Whip would have known him and worked with him for many years. He was a special, dedicated, hard-working county councillor for the ten years he spent on Waterford City and County Council. He was a community activist. Gaeilge was a big love as well as many other issues. Serving people and his community was his motto. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis for both men.

As we approach another budget, families, workers, farmers, hauliers and a lot of small business people – nearly everyone – are really frustrated with the Government's approach to helping people in this crisis. Following the fuel protests and growing public anger, the Government introduced limited temporary measures. They were welcomed by the people but now when we see the price of diesel again at €2.20, and even €2.30 in places, they are like snow off a ditch. They are gone and there is no impact at all from them. The reality is fuel is not a luxury. It is a necessity. Workers need to get to work. Farmers need machinery to plough and till their lands and provide food, which is really important, and have vehicles to operate. Carers need to visit vulnerable people. Small businesses are squeezed to the limit. The cost of transport is just crippling everybody. Above all, there is the home heating oil. Pensioners and ordinary families are trying to fill their tanks at double the price of last year and worse. It is really unthinkable.

The Government continues to pile costs onto motorists through carbon taxes while taking an enormous share of the profit paid at the pump. We must look at that figure. Where a litre of fuel costs €2.15, the Taoiseach's Government is taking approximately 91 cent from every litre through excise duty, carbon tax levies and VAT. He has his hand in the people's pockets every day of the week - himself and the Tánaiste, Simon Harris. It is time he took it out of it and gave fair play to the people. Fair play is fine play with me. They need fair play. They do not want fine play but they need fair play. They need to be respected here in the crisis they are in, especially in rural Ireland when we do not have public transport. Cars and vans are a

necessity, not a luxury. They have to have them. The Taoiseach's obsession, when he was in government with the Green Party, with the carbon tax and everything else has to be rethought, re-examined and totally stopped for the present time to have further evaluation because the money, or an awful lot of it, is not going back into retrofitting, as I have pointed out here before.

Does the Taoiseach accept that the carbon tax must be halted rather than increased and that we must give meaningful supports? Talk in the media of €7.50 for pensioners is not acceptable. They need a decent modicum of a respectable increase to allow them to have a modicum of living that should be available to them and is not.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. As I said earlier, we are in the midst of a very significant cost-of-living issue because of two major wars, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the war in Iran, which have caused very significant increases in oil prices. Oil prices have risen from about \$69 a barrel in February last to about \$104 in May, while gas prices increased from €32 to €47 per megawatt hour. These are very significant increases.

In the last budget we brought in a series of measures under social protection to protect the lowest incomes. The Deputy said what we introduced earlier this year were limited temporary measures in respect of reducing the excise by 27 cent a litre on petrol and 32 cent per litre on diesel, 7.4% in terms of marked oil, and other measures we took in terms of hauliers, contractors and so on. The cost of that was €1.3 billion and they are still in place so they are not limited and they have not been too temporary either. The Government is examining all of that in the context of the budget.

The carbon tax is much lower than any of that. It is about 2 cent – that is the increase that will come - and we are looking at the home heating component of the carbon tax in terms of kerosene and gas because we realise that home heating is critical for pensioners and so forth. We examined that in the context of the forthcoming budget. However, there is a limit. If we go below a certain threshold of carbon tax we then have to pay carbon tax to Europe, essentially, under the ETS2. That makes no sense because the carbon tax is used for farmers, retrofitting and the energy-saving, cost-saving measures that Darragh O'Brien has been very effective on. He announced a further €115 million yesterday that will significantly benefit a lot of households to go solar or for other insulation, such as attic and cavity wall insulation, and batteries. All of that will bring down the cost of energy for individual households by close to €800 or €900 a year, which would meet some of the increases that have occurred over the last while since the wars broke out.

About 287,000 houses have availed of retrofitting grants and various measures that will help them permanently reduce their energy costs. We have to double down on that. We have to increase the availability of TAMS for farmers in respect of solar, for example, and we should make sure that happens comprehensively because that will make a difference. Where we provide a lot of resources across the board, farmers have shown they will respond by adopting measures and mechanisms such as solar to save and reduce costs. That is something we are very focused on doing.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: No farmers, no food. Irish forestry contractors will be in the audiovisual room this evening.

People are at their wits' end. The Taoiseach does not seem to realise it. I mentioned the Taoiseach's hand in the people's pockets. The data centres and all these other companies have very deep pockets and the Taoiseach is saying to me he is very afraid to even go near their pockets or even ask them to take out their handkerchief. He will not touch them at all. Fair play is what is needed here. We need to finally get rid of this excessive carbon tax. It was slipped in in a shoddy way seven or eight years ago in the convention centre for ten years without ever a vote in this House again. Many parties here now who are opposing it and shouting about it were party to it so it is codology to think that.

People out there cannot afford to retrofit their houses. They have not the first €25,000 to put up in the first place. They are barely about to put food on the table. They are barely able to send their kids to school. That is the reality of it. I do not know how the Taoiseach is so adrift from it and Fianna Fáil has removed itself so much from the ordinary people, na daoine na hÉireann. They are out there and struggling. They are willing to put their shoulder to the wheel – they always do – but they need supports and they need meaningful support from this budget-----

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

Deputy Mattie McGrath: -----and we need carbon tax not paused but ended.

The Taoiseach: My understanding is that it was in budget 2010 that the carbon tax was introduced so it was not introduced five or six years ago.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It was passed in the convention centre.

The Taoiseach: It was 2010 it was brought in. The carbon tax is much bigger than what the Deputy is suggesting happened. Five or six years ago there were defined increases legislated for in respect of the carbon tax.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: By this House.

The Taoiseach: The actual carbon tax itself goes back to 2010.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I know that.

The Taoiseach: In any event, it supports a lot of farmers. It supports the retrofitting programme which, as I said, about 280,000 people have now benefited from and also in relation to fuel poverty as well.

The bigger issue is the wars have increased fuel prices enormously. That is the bigger issue. Yes, there is huge pressure on people and that is why we helped haulage, farmers and contractors with the measures we introduced earlier in the year.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You are taking part in the war in Ukraine.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy McGrath.

The Taoiseach: Also, the budget-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You are giving money out of tax people are paying.

The Taoiseach: ----- through income tax reductions-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You are part of the war machine.

The Taoiseach: -----through strong social protection-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You are a part of the war machine.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy McGrath. Allow the Taoiseach to answer.

The Taoiseach: We are part of no war machine.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You are of course.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We will conclude on that, Taoiseach.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Any time they come over here he gets pocket money going home-

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy McGrath.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: -----like snuff at a wake.

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

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Sure, that is the facts of it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Before we move to Questions on Policy or Legislation, on behalf of the Ceann Comhairle and myself I want to join with the other Members who have expressed condolences to the Carroll family on the untimely death of Seamus Carroll. I offer sincere condolences to Seamus's wife, Treasa, who also works in the service, their family and all the staff of the superintendents section, everyone who knew Seamus and who enjoyed his friendly chat with him over the last 11 years of his service here. He was a gentleman and a very fine parliamentary usher. He will be sadly missed. May he rest in peace.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

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

Deputy Pa Daly: I would also like to be associated with those comments.

The Taoiseach does not need me to remind him of the damage that was done to children in Kerry during the CAMHS overdosing of children. For example, children with social anxieties were given anti-psychotic medication.

Even the most vulnerable of children with intellectual disabilities and autism were given polypharmacy, leading to long-term physical and mental damage.

For years, we, in Sinn Féin, and many other people have been saying that anybody who has received an apology, where liability is therefore not an issue, should be allowed into the scheme for compensation. If they are not in the scheme, they are doubly punished - apart from all of the dosing - by not being able to access money to pay for medical reports and private therapies.

Today, we see the news that a lawyer representing some people has applied to the High Court to take a case where siblings are included while other brothers and sisters are not and where neighbours are included while other neighbours are not. Where there is an apology, everybody should be included in the scheme so they are not doubly punished-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Daly should conclude. The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Pa Daly: -----and the time limits should be abolished. This case should be looked at rather than spending more money that is not there in defending it.

The Taoiseach: I do not believe there is any need for the High Court case. It will only ramp up costs on all sides. No affected young person is being excluded from the scheme. A small number of cases have not been excluded but are being progressed through the further file review. These would have been patients who had previously received open disclosure letters through previous *ad hoc* independent reviews. It has always been the intention that they would be included in the compensation scheme and they have been prioritised in the current review process so they can be among the first invited to apply when formal notifications issue.

To be fair to the Minister - and I was involved as Taoiseach at the time this first arose - we moved very quickly to ease trauma on families in terms of the redress side of it.

Deputy Pa Daly: I disagree with that.

The Taoiseach: We did not wait for cases or anything. We just brought in a non-adversarial compensatory framework which, I think, has been the better way to do things.

Deputy Pa Daly: It was brought in after many lot of years.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: Some 100,000 public sector workers begin work to rule today. Next week, they will be joined by their colleagues in the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland, ASTI, and the Irish National Teachers Organisation, INTO. On 14 October, we are facing a

public sector strike. The Social Democrats and I stand in solidarity with all of those workers. Those commencing work to rule are nurses, hospital workers, local authority workers - people who are on the front line of public services. They help us when we are sick. They keep our communities clean and safe. They step up and do the vital work for each and every one of us every single day and they do so in services that are frequently underfunded and overstretched. The industrial action taking place today and in the coming weeks is because of this Government's failure to engage in meaningful public sector pay talks and, sadly, this could have been avoided.

It has been a frustrating summer, where unions have been clear that they will not accept talks without the basis that there would be a meaningful offer on pay. When will the Government come to the table to avoid further disruption and strike action, engage in good faith with the unions for a new public sector pay deal and deliver for our public sector workers and all of us who rely on those crucial public services?

The Taoiseach: Deep down the unions and their leadership know there will be a meaningful discussion on pay. They know that. There is no need for this strike action. It is causing unnecessary disruption. There is no need for it, in my view. After a long interval in opposition, I came back into government in 2020 and we have had pay agreements. We entered into pay agreements in good faith and we had good negotiations. I participate in the Labour Employer Economic Forum, LEEF, on an ongoing basis. The unions know my attitude and that of the Government towards continuing social dialogue and public service pay negotiations. We have expanded the public service exponentially in the past five or six years. The membership has grown, and all the unions as well, because of that expansion in the public service.

We understand the pressures on everybody. We will have a budget that will help workers, so there is no need for this industrial action. Yesterday, the Minister issued a formal letter of invitation to the unions. He already publicly articulated his openness and that the door is open for negotiations. Of course we want to negotiate a pay agreement; that is clear to everybody. I do not believe there is a need for strike action. A letter has issued from the Minister for public expenditure. I think the unions should call off the industrial action and enter into negotiations with the Government. You will find that in next week's budget, there will be a significant provision.

Deputy Duncan Smith: First, I wish to pass on the condolences of the Labour Party on the passing of Seamus Carroll, a genuinely warm presence in these corridors for many years. He will be sorely missed and our thoughts are with Treasa and his wider family.

There is a need for this industrial action. The 100,000 front-line workers across health, education and local authorities do not want to be on a work to rule. They do not want strike action on 14 and 21 October and they feel they are being gaslit by the Government because it does not want to engage on pay. That is the key thing. The Government has let the current pay agreement lapse. The unions, as the Taoiseach knows, will negotiate but they want to negotiate on pay. The best method to tackle a cost-of-living crisis is more pay for hard-pressed workers. This Government is not engaging on this. It can gaslight and say all it wants, and the Department can put out its statements but the fact is that this Government is not willing to negotiate on pay. Until it is willing to negotiate on pay, the unions will escalate their strikes

and will have our support to do so. Will the Government please come to the table and negotiate a public sector pay deal?

The Taoiseach: I am not one for games or all sorts of industrial relations, IR, mechanisms and processes. I will be straight with the Deputy: that is a nonsense statement. There will be a substantial provision in the budget and the Estimates next week for public service pay. How can anybody credibly say we are not prepared to discuss pay? Come on. Everybody knows that is not true. Let us have a bit of common sense here. There will be a public service pay offer. It is well known. We are open to negotiations.

In any pay agreement, by the way, we discuss a whole range of issues pertaining to public service reforms and local pay bargaining. A whole range of issues get discussed in the context of a pay agreement. We have invited the unions in; there should not be this industrial action, in my view. The previous two agreements were beneficial, particularly to lower-paid workers, and were above inflation. If you look at the increase in public service pay, it has been quite dramatic. I think it has gone from about €21 billion in 2018 to €36 billion in the present day. There has been a very substantial increase in public service pay but, of course, pressures have grown as well because of all the crises we have experienced. We were very responsive during the Covid-19 pandemic to workers generally. We responded with agility and so on. It is not fair for the Deputy to say what he just said.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The budget is coming next week and the family resource centres provide very essential services at 136 locations. The family resource centres in Portlaoise and Mountmellick are doing excellent work that is making a real difference in local communities with services such as childcare, counselling, health and well-being programmes, adult learning, social inclusion and much more. They are right where it matters and I can see the evidence on the ground in towns like Portlaoise and Mountmellick.

The budget is next week and I appeal to the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance to ensure they are funded to continue doing that important work. Their core funding at the moment is €180,000 per year. They have three employees; some of them have four. That core funding needs a substantial uplift. Second, they need dedicated funding for the huge amount of counselling they are providing. Last year, they provided 64,700 counselling sessions for people. Some family resource centres, FRCs, are in need of capital funding. I know the Taoiseach has a lot of asks but I ask him to ensure these family resource centres have the funding to continue that important work into 2026 and 2027.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy. He is on a very good topic.

Deputy Brian Stanley: It is a good day to do it.

The Taoiseach: The Minister, Deputy Foley, in particular, is a very strong supporter of family resource centres and last year, she secured funding for the establishment of ten new family resource centres. I agree with the Deputy that family resource centres play a very significant role in communities across the country. I am a strong advocate for them and I know the Minister is as well. I hope she will be successful in securing some funding for them in the budget.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: I wish to extend my deepest sympathies to Treasa and family on the passing of Seamus Carroll. He was a great friend, with great banter, and his friendship will be dearly missed in this House.

After co-chairing a conference in Dublin Castle during our EU Presidency and after speaking to many colleagues across Europe, I have a question for the Taoiseach. I need him to be very clear in his answer. Is it possible to cap the taxation on fuel from budget to budget in this country? We could cap it from budget to budget and if there was an increase in the cost, the cost would be the cost and it would not be an increase in tax. It would not take away from any taxation that preceded the capping. We could tax it at €1.70, which is 10% more than the taxation of last year's average, and after that we would pay the increased cost.

I o'clock

In that way it would have no implications for the public finances. In the shocks that are coming forward, people would only pay the increased cost, without a tax.

The Taoiseach: Is the Deputy talking about VAT?

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: I am talking about a cap on the complete taxes.

The Taoiseach: The bottom line is we have given back about €1.3 billion. Not given back, I am sorry, that is-----

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: The Government took it back in increased costs.

The Taoiseach: We did not. That is the point.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: You did.

The Taoiseach: No, that is a false comparison.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: It is not.

The Taoiseach: We did not, in any shape or form, have anything equivalent to €1.3 billion. The figure for increased VAT returns and so on is much lower.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: When it is taken over a whole year, you did.

The Taoiseach: No.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Order, Deputy.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: No, you are wrong.

The Taoiseach: I will try to arrange, through the Minister for Finance, a meeting between the Deputy and others and finance officials to get the full, transparent presentation of that. I make the point, however, that revenue across government is also required to sustain schools, as the Deputy advocates, and to support farmers and so on.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: And also to put food on the table for the people who go to those schools-----

The Taoiseach: I agree 100%, which is why-----

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: -----and to let people go to work and pay their taxes for those schools to open.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Order, please. I call Deputy Séamus McGrath.

The Taoiseach: That is why we have free hot school meals in every single school at primary level.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Taoiseach, resume your seat.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: Will you go away?

Deputy Mary Butler: That scheme costs €300 million.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I highlight the concerns being raised about the curtailment of the domino midwifery service at Cork University Maternity Hospital, CUMH. As the Taoiseach knows, the domino service provides midwife-led, community-based maternity care, with continuity of care from pregnancy through to birth and postnatal, providing care in the community and in the home. It has emerged in recent days that due to staff shortages at CUMH, there is likely to be redeployment of nurses and midwives from the domino services to the labour ward. The INMO has said that up to 80 nursing and midwifery posts are vacant at CUMH due to a recruitment pause imposed during the summer. The domino maternity care service provides care for up to 400 women annually, providing critical options for them in their maternity care. I strongly urge that any potential curtailment of this service be reversed and that normal levels of service be protected and provided in future. I ask the Taoiseach to take up this issue with the Minister for Health and the Department.

The Taoiseach: My understanding is that the domino scheme at Cork University Maternity Hospital remains operational and available both to women currently using the service and new patients who meet the eligibility criteria. Care is delivered through three pathways, namely, the supported care pathway, the assisted care pathway and the specialised care pathway for high-risk pregnancies led by a named consultant obstetrician. To cut to the chase, the HSE has advised that from 12 October, changes to staffing arrangements within the service will come into effect. However, the service will continue to operate. Women will continue to be able to access the scheme and patient safety will remain the overriding priority in the implementation

of these arrangements. Antenatal care will continue to be delivered through the domino pathway, supported by midwives in the outpatient department. Antenatal education and support will be available through the parentcraft education programme. The HSE has confirmed that where operationally feasible domino services will continue to support women who present in labour at the birthing suite in CUMH. There is a lot more information here, which I can give to the Deputy.

Deputy Michael Murphy: In January of this year, the faculty of pathology at the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland published a report on autopsy provision in Ireland, which it described as a crisis emerging. We already see this in Waterford. HSE pathologists have withdrawn from Department of justice contracts to provide coronial post-mortems in Waterford. This will have a devastating impact for families waiting to bury their loved ones in a timely manner. I have two questions. First, the report calls for an interdepartmental working group in which the Departments of Health and justice would come up with a sustainable national solution. Second, I asked the Department of justice to make available the costs associated with bringing in three locum pathologists weekly since January to provide that service in Waterford in the interim. The Department has refused to give that information. It has cited commercial sensitivities. I see none here and I ask the Taoiseach to commit to making that information available to the House.

The Taoiseach: Securing the provision of a post-mortem examination service for the coronial death investigation function has proved challenging. The Ministers for justice and Health have engaged on the issue. The short-term solution in operation at University Hospital Waterford is one in which locum pathologists provide coroner services three days per week. This is obviously necessary to minimise any impact on bereaved family members who would otherwise experience lengthy wait times for the release of remains. Officials from the Department of justice are working on drafting the heads of a Bill to significantly reform the coroner service. A more sustainable solution is required than a locum service. I will talk to both Ministers in respect of this issue, as I already have. There are also issues within the pathology profession, including with training and recruitment, as well as competing demands on pathologists in areas of diagnostic and research work.

Deputy Michael Murphy: It is just the costs for Waterford.

The Taoiseach: I do not have those here.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I implore the Taoiseach again to ensure an emergency funding package is provided to Monaghan and Cavan county councils in respect of local road restoration. In many areas, our local roads are in the most deplorable state I have ever seen. Over the past number of years, in real terms there has been a substantial reduction in the funding provided to those local authorities for these works. This year, bizarrely and amazingly, there has been a decrease at a time when inflation in road restoration costs is rising constantly. Many people in rural communities are now in a situation where they cannot drive on their local roads without fear of bursting a tire or damaging the suspension of their cars. They pay their taxes, motor tax, local property tax, carbon tax and huge insurance costs. They are paying and paying but they are not getting the level of service with respect to the condition of their roads that they

deserve. Will the Government provide emergency funding packages to local authorities this year to address this crisis?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy will be glad to know that at the Fianna Fáil Parliamentary Party meeting last evening, Deputy Brendan Smith, Senator Gallagher and the Minister of State, Deputy Smyth, articulated similar concerns to those the Deputy raised about Monaghan, Cavan and some other areas of the country. We are very conscious of the pressure on roads, especially from storms and inclement weather, which have compounded the problem. Enormous sums of money are going into the national road network. About €1.5 billion was announced on 17 February this year for national, regional and local roads in total. It is a 13% increase on 2025, or €163 million more than last year's allocation. Inflation is eating into that and, as I said, the weather is compounding the problem. As a result, in July we added a further €40 million to address damage to local and regional roads caused by Storm Chandra. We accept there is an issue and we will, in the context of the Estimates, see if we can do more for roads.

Deputy Mark Wall: I raise with the Taoiseach again the planned new school for St. Anne's Special School on the Curragh in County Kildare. I raised this issue with him four months ago and he got the Minister for education to respond to me on that occasion. Unfortunately, there has been no progress since. Instead, two planned meetings with school management to progress the project have been postponed with no alternative dates offered by the Department of education. The Taoiseach and I spoke that day about school management dealing with continuous leaks, inadequate heating and children who are wheelchair users not having access to inclusive equipment at lunchtimes. Given the Taoiseach's commitment to special education I ask him once again to contact the Minister for education and get this much-needed project at St. Anne's Special School moving, with either an interim solution or the long-term solution of a new school build.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy, who has raised this with me before. I am glad he had contact with the Department. I will talk to the Ministers again in respect of it. We are focusing strongly on special education and capital provision to get as many places secured as we possibly physically can. Obviously, this would be a significant advance on that.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: As the debate on the three-day wait continues at the health committee, women still face barriers to accessing abortion care. The HSE clinical director said there was no medical evidence behind retaining this provision and the Government must act urgently to remove the three-day wait. More significantly, it has been a number of years since the then Government commissioned the independent O'Shea review into how our abortion legislation works. That review contains several recommendations, including decriminalisation of medical practitioners, reforming fatal foetal abnormality restrictions that are still forcing women to travel and addressing geographic gaps in service provision. Will the Government outline a legislative roadmap for implementing these recommendations beyond the three-day wait? I know this issue is difficult and contentious but we cannot continue to ignore the recommendations of the review.

The Taoiseach: It is a very sensitive issue, with many different perspectives across the House and the country in respect of it.

We had a referendum a number of years ago that essentially created the legislative framework that now governs termination of pregnancy services. Significant progress has been made in that respect over the past number of years, which sometimes does not get acknowledged in the commentary.

As the Deputy knows, a Private Members' Bill relating to the three-day waiting period for termination in early pregnancy passed Second Stage in June and is currently undergoing detailed scrutiny by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health. Officials from the Department of Health and the HSE appeared before the joint committee as part of the process. The Minister and her team will continue to engage constructively with the joint committee and Deputy Cullinane regarding the progress of this Bill. We are aware there is a varied and broad range of sincerely held opinion on the abolition of the three-day waiting period, so we have allowed a conscience vote on this issue and support respectful debate on it.

Deputy Catherine Callaghan: As committed to in the programme for Government, Ireland is to establish a statutory national security authority that can provide, and is capable of providing, the full range of personnel and facility clearances. Given the current security environment in which we are all operating, this is not just a security issue but also, potentially, an economic one. Certain EU research programmes require those clearances. Can the Taoiseach indicate when the national security authority will be fully operational and whether the current gap is limiting opportunities for research institutes like South East Technological University, SETU, and businesses I represent across Carlow and Kilkenny that are seeking to compete for these European opportunities?

The Taoiseach: I am obviously very well aware of this issue. It is challenging legislation and work is under way in the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration in respect of it. Interim arrangements have been put in place as well to accelerate security clearances for personnel where this is required, particularly in research and industry. It is a very important issue.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I raise the situation affecting newly qualified nurses from the University of Galway, a number of whom come from County Clare, who have been in touch with me about an issue in the past few days. In January, the graduating class of about 80 nurses was told they would get permanent positions after graduation. They followed the usual pre-recruitment steps over the next few months and were expecting to get their job offers during the summer. Interviews were done and a panel was formed but that seems to have been totally undone now, with recruitment almost completely stalled. Orientation for these nurses was due to start in the past week but so far, I am told, only nine of the 80 nurses have actually received jobs. The remaining 71 are in a total state of limbo. I understand there is a huge number of staff nurse vacancies in University Hospital Galway that could be filled with these posts. At a time when we need nurses more than ever, these nurses are wondering what can be done, given the promise that was made to them when they graduated. Can the Government give any commitment to these nurses that they will be offered jobs in our front-line hospitals soon?

The Taoiseach: During the summer, there was an acceleration of recruitment within the HSE. That was even above approved staffing levels, so it has created a challenge for the HSE. That

said, the HSE is looking at the nursing issue, specifically what can be done to accommodate those who have graduated. There are pressures on the HSE budget. There is no point in saying otherwise. We would like to prioritise front-line workers and particularly the recruitment of nurses. Over the past number of years, we have been in a position to provide vacancies for the full complement of graduates coming out of nursing colleges. That has been good because it creates good opportunities and prospects for graduates and is also good for the health service. I will continue to engage with the Minister on this.

Deputy Donna McGettigan: I should not have to stand in this Chamber and ask for services for survivors of rape or sexual assault, but here I am because there is no 24-7 sexual assault treatment unit in the mid-west. This means that survivors have no immediate access to forensic medical examination, leaving some survivors travelling significant distances - some on buses - to access specialist, time-sensitive care that is not available locally. The forensic medical examination service in University Hospital Limerick, UHL, is only available at certain times, meaning someone could be waiting hours in order to be forensically examined. The person needs to report this to An Garda Síochána. This means that if the person has just been raped or sexually assaulted, they have to make an on-the-call at the moment to report this in order to be seen in their locality. We know the report levels are extremely low, meaning many in the mid-west will not be able to seek the help they need. When will survivors of rape or sexual assault in the mid-west be given the same standard of care as those in other areas? When will a 24-7 sexual assault treatment unit be placed in the mid-west?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising a very important issue. I support the provision of services for those who have been sexually assaulted and the establishment of centres to do that. I do not have the specifics in respect of the progression of this in the mid-west but I will talk to the Minister about it. I would be fully supportive of it, subject to resource availability.

Deputy Seán Kyne: Residents of Carragh Hill and Carragh Drive estates in Knocknacarra in Galway city have raised significant concerns regarding the construction of an 18 m telecommunications mast by Vantage Towers under a section 254 licence by Galway City Council. Construction commenced despite ongoing efforts by the community to challenge the licence and seek further information regarding the approval process. Residents state that many households became aware of the development only after contractors arrived on site and there was no engagement, notification or site notice, despite the fact that the tower would be 15 m from some residents. As I said, it is 18 m high. There appears to be a loophole under section 254 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, which is advertised by Government as a requirement for a licence for such items as vending machines, advertisement structures, cables, wires, pipelines, telephone poles, cabinets and kiosks. I do not believe an 18 m telecommunication structure or mast was ever envisaged under a section 254 licence. My colleague, Councillor Clodagh Higgins, has arranged a meeting with the CEO of Galway City Council on Friday morning. I ask the Taoiseach to engage with the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage to see that this loophole is closed.

The Taoiseach: Under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, the Minister with responsibility for planning is specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular planning-related matter with which a planning

authority or the board is or may be concerned. There is a legislative prohibition on a Minister intervening in any specific planning application or issue. In terms of the legislation more broadly and what the Deputy has identified as a potential loophole, I will refer this to the Minister, get the background to it and get the up-to-date position to validate what has been said in terms of the Deputy's presentation.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I also express my sincere sympathy to Treasa and the Carroll family on the death of Seamus. He was a thorough gentleman who helped each and every one of us here with a smile on his face every day that he was here. I have been asked by several farmers in County Kerry, and indeed around the country, to ensure that ample ferries are made available to transport live cattle to mainland Europe. We are an island country surrounded by water. Brittany Ferries gave up in the past few weeks. Irish Ferries continues to do its level best at all times for animal exports. However, from 1 January next, the seasonal increase will occur. I ask the Taoiseach to ensure we have adequate ferries to take our calves and cattle to mainland Europe. It is vital and imperative for farmers. It is a real concern of theirs to ensure we have adequate ferries to transport our cattle to mainland Europe to the Single Market. I ask the Taoiseach to make sure of that from 1 January.

The Taoiseach: Obviously, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine is very aware of the situation with regard to ferries and the capacity to transport live cattle. Other companies are also examining this and we hope that a solution to it will be in place by 1 January. I know the Minister is very concerned and is acting on it.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: I offer my condolences and those of the Green Party on the death of our colleague, Seamus Carroll. Yesterday, the Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence heard from EirGrid, ESB Networks and the CRU. They raised some of the clearest concerns yet about the impact of data centres on our grid. These are not NGOs that the Government can brush off. They are State bodies and they were warning in no uncertain terms that there are trade-offs to the level of data centre growth the Government wants to pursue. Jim Gannon from the CRU stated that large AI-focused facilities can exceed 100 MW in demand, with annual electricity consumption comparable to that of around 100,000 households.

The CRU stated that data centres could account for 35% of Ireland's electricity demand by 2035.

The Green Party believes there should be a moratorium on new data centre connections until our grid's capacity has been expanded. Is it not time that the Government, at a minimum, set restrictions on the amount of grid capacity that data centres can use? Without safeguards, these data centres will continue to push up household energy bills, which will be a disaster for energy affordability and for our private targets.

The Taoiseach: Essentially, over the last five years, there was almost a *de facto* moratorium on data centres, and the exponential increase in data centres predated the last four to five years. Under the large energy user action plan, LEAP, which was published in January of this year, we are moving to a plan-led system that will provide greater certainty for industry and ensure that the cost of developing necessary additional infrastructure is borne in a manner that is fair and balanced. This has been reinforced by unprecedented grid investment. Up to €18 billion

can be spent on the grid, which supports all areas that are beneficial to the economy. The 2025 CRU large energy user connection policy sets out the criteria that must be met by new data centres seeking connection to the electricity system. That policy is being implemented by EirGrid and ESBN system operators.

We need a more measured debate. There is no doubt that data centres are using significant amounts of energy, and AI is going to compound that. Are we saying that we are going to decouple ourselves from AI investment into the future? The ICT industry is a critical industry, and by that I mean ICT generally. The world we live in today depends on data centres. The issue is where they are located, but there will have to be data centres located somewhere. The issue for us is that we have to do it in a balanced way. I accept that.

Deputy Michael Cahill: I acknowledge the €10 million allocation for the Ring of Kerry road by the Minister for Transport this year. However, this national secondary road has been neglected for decades, with many sections in a dangerous and shocking condition and with many humps and hollows. It is up to 70% substandard. Thankfully, at long last, €1.5 million has been announced for Cahersiveen town, with works to commence in the coming weeks. Significant additional funding is required for Cahersiveen, Glenbeigh, Killorglin, Sneem, Caherdaniel and many other areas along the route. This is Ireland's premier tourist route where people drive along the Wild Atlantic Way beside the sea, yet they cannot see the ocean. This beggars belief, and given the Ring of Kerry's magnificent views, it is a disgrace.

There is an urgent need for TII to allocate funding for a long-reach hedge cutter and for trained personnel to climb down underneath the cliff edge, where they can cut the trees that are growing up from under the cliff edge. This should be a priority for locals, tourists and all road users.

The Taoiseach: First, I want to thank Deputy Cahill. He has been a strong advocate for that road on the Ring of Kerry. I know that he is welcoming the €10 million, but he is looking for more. It is a nice phrase - humps and hollows. It is poetic, but while it may be poetic, it is not good enough for the driver traversing that road. The €5 million for Cahersiveen, which the Deputy lobbied strongly for, is very welcome. The Ring of Kerry is a famous and beautiful route, with some great views and so forth. We will talk to the Minister. We know that roads are an issue. We will see if we can secure additional funding next year again, although there is a fair degree of investment going down in that direction. I hear Deputy Cahill loud and clear. I am not familiar with the technical details of long-range cutters but, again, I will see what can be done.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 1.24 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 2.24 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 1.24 p.m. and resumed at 2.24 p.m.

Migration and Citizenship: Statements

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Colm Brophy): I welcome the opportunity to address the House today on migration and the

continued development of Ireland's migration system, a subject of significant importance, not only for the Government but for Irish society as a whole.

Migration has always been part of Ireland's story. For generations, Irish people left these shores in search of opportunity, security and a better future, building lives and careers across the globe while maintaining deep and lasting connections to the country they had left behind. Many of those who emigrated made enormous contributions to the countries that welcomed them, and their experiences shaped not only our national history but also our collective understanding of what it means to seek opportunity, safety and the chance to create a better life for oneself and one's family.

Over recent decades, Ireland has evolved from a country largely defined by emigration to one that is increasingly characterised by immigration, with people from every corner of the world choosing Ireland as a place to live, work, study, invest, innovate and raise their families. Those who come here make important contributions across every sector of our economy and society. They work in our hospitals, schools, universities, businesses and public services, helping to drive economic growth while also supporting communities across the country and contributing to the success of our nation.

There can be no doubt that migration has strengthened Ireland and enriched our society in countless ways. It is important for me to say clearly that this Government recognises the value of those contributions. The people who have chosen to make their lives here have helped to shape the modern Ireland we know today and they will continue to play an important role in our future development and prosperity.

At the same time, migration is not a temporary phenomenon or a passing trend. Rather, it is one of the defining features of the modern world. Economic development, technological change, demographic pressures, labour market demands, humanitarian crises and international conflict all contribute to movements of people across borders on a scale not seen in previous generations. These are developments that are affecting countries throughout Europe and beyond, and Ireland is not insulated from those wider global trends.

As a small, open and outward-looking country, deeply connected to Europe and the wider world, migration will continue to play an important role in our future. Our economic success, demographic needs and international obligations all mean that migration will remain an important feature of Irish society for many years to come. The questions facing policymakers, therefore, are not whether migration occurs, but how it is managed and how we ensure that our migration system can respond to changing circumstances in a manner that is effective, fair and sustainable.

That requires a migration framework capable of achieving a number of important objectives simultaneously. It must support economic growth and competitiveness by enabling Ireland to attract the skills and talent that our economy requires. It must allow us to meet our humanitarian and international obligations to those fleeing persecution, conflict and instability. It must maintain secure borders and robust immigration procedures while ensuring that applications are dealt with fairly and efficiently. Above all, it must command and retain the confidence of the public.

These objectives are not contradictory. Indeed, they are mutually reinforcing. A migration system that is not managed effectively risks losing public confidence, while a migration system

that lacks public confidence ultimately becomes more difficult to sustain over the longer term. Equally, a migration framework that is fair, transparent and rules-based, that provides certainty for applicants and consistency in decision-making, is one that is capable of maintaining the trust and support of the wider public. That is why this Government has been clear that Ireland must have a migration system that is welcoming to those who come here legally and contribute positively to Irish society, while also being firm, fair and effective in its operation.

We must continue to support economic migration, uphold our humanitarian commitments and promote successful integration, but we must do so within a framework that is orderly, sustainable and capable of responding to the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Ultimately, the principle of a rules-based migration system underpins every aspect of the Government's approach. It informs the reforms we are pursuing, the investments we are making and the long-term strategy we are developing to ensure that Ireland's migration system continues to serve the interests of the country, the communities that welcome new arrivals and those who come here seeking to build a future.

It is for precisely this reason that the Government is approaching migration not merely as a series of operational challenges to be addressed in isolation, but as a long-term strategic issue requiring co-ordinated planning across government. The development of a national migration and integration strategy reflects that broader approach and recognises that migration will remain an important feature of Irish society for many years to come.

As Members will appreciate, migration is not a stand-alone policy issue. It is a matter that touches virtually every area of public policy and has implications across government. Migration impacts economic development, labour market planning, housing, education, healthcare, integration, social protection, foreign affairs and national security. For this reason, migration cannot be viewed solely through the lens of any single Department or agency. It requires a whole-of government approach, long-term planning and a willingness to balance a range of important and, at times, competing considerations.

The reality is that migration presents both opportunities and challenges. Ireland's continued economic success depends on our ability to attract skills and talent from around the world, while our international obligations require us to provide protection to those who are genuinely fleeing persecution and conflict.

At the same time, we must ensure that our immigration systems remain robust, secure and capable of responding to changing circumstances while also supporting communities across the country that are experiencing the practical impacts of a growing population and increasing demand for public services.

Against that backdrop, the Government is developing Ireland's first national migration and integration strategy. The purpose of that work is to provide a coherent long-term framework that will enable Ireland to respond effectively to migration challenges while also preparing for an ageing population and future economic and societal changes. Migration policy requires a strategic framework that considers how migration intersects with broader national objectives including economic competitiveness, social cohesion and public service delivery.

Work on the development of the national migration and integration strategy is progressing across government, with engagement taking place across Departments and with relevant stakeholders. The objective is to develop a framework that sets out a long-term vision for how

Ireland approaches migration while also ensuring that policy development in areas such as housing, employment, education, integration and public services is informed by a clear understanding of future migration trends and needs. The strategy will establish a framework through which the Government can better anticipate migration trends, assess their implications for public services, support workforce and infrastructure planning and incorporate migration considerations into long-term policy development.

The strategy will not seek to address migration solely through the lens of immigration policy. Rather, it recognises that migration intersects with a wide range of economic and social objectives and that successful outcomes require joined-up planning across a number of policy areas. In that regard, the development of the strategy represents an opportunity to establish a more coherent and sustainable framework for managing migration while ensuring the Government is better positioned to respond to future challenges and opportunities. The development of the strategy reflects an understanding that migration will remain an important feature of Irish society for decades to come. It is therefore necessary and appropriate that the Government adopts a longer term perspective, identifying the opportunities that migration presents while ensuring that the necessary systems, infrastructure and policies are in place to address the challenges that can arise.

Central to this work is a rules-based migration system. That principle informs every aspect of the Government's approach. People should be able to understand the legal pathways available to them to come to Ireland. Applications should be considered efficiently and fairly, and decisions should be made in accordance with the law. Rights, procedures and safeguards must be protected. Equally, once decisions are made, they must be implemented in a consistent and effective manner. A rules-based system benefits everyone. It provides clarity and certainty for applicants, supports confidence among employers and communities and enables the State to manage migration in an orderly, fair and sustainable way. It is through such a system that we can ensure Ireland remains welcoming and open while also maintaining the integrity of our immigration framework and the confidence of the wider public.

However, migration policy does not begin and end at the point of arrival. Successful migration policy must also focus on what happens afterwards. It must support people to participate fully in Irish society and to become active members of the communities in which they live. That is why integration remains a central pillar of the Government's approach. Integration is a two-way process that benefits both new arrivals and the communities that welcome them. It is also about ensuring that people have opportunities to work, access education, learn languages, engage with public services and participate fully in civic and community life, and fostering social cohesion, encouraging mutual understanding and ensuring the benefits of migration are shared more broadly across society.

The Government remains committed to supporting positive integration outcomes because strong integration is essential to maintaining public confidence in the migration system and ensuring that people who come to Ireland can contribute to their full potential. When individuals are supported to participate in the workforce, engage with their communities and build lasting connections, the benefits extend far beyond the individuals concerned. They strengthen communities, support economic growth and contribute to a more cohesive and resilient society. As migration continues to shape Ireland's future, it is important that we approach these issues in a strategic and balanced way. The development of a national migration

and integration strategy is therefore an important step in ensuring that Ireland has a clear, co-ordinated and sustainable framework for managing migration in the years ahead. It also provides the broader context for many of the reforms being implemented across the migration system.

Perhaps nowhere is the importance of long-term planning and effective administration and policy development more evident than in the significant reforms now under way within our international protection system. While migration has affected many years of public policy, it is fair to say there were visible pressures on the migration system in recent years in the areas of international protection, accommodation provision and the State's response to the war in Ukraine. In recent years, Ireland has experienced significant pressures across its migration system. Between 2022 and 2025, the State received more than 45,000 international protection applications, almost matching the total number received during the previous 16 years. At the same time, Ireland responded to the humanitarian consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine by welcoming more than 120,000 people fleeing conflict and seeking safety. These developments placed unprecedented pressure on the accommodation system, public services and administrative capacity. Throughout that period, public servants across multiple Departments, State agencies and local authorities worked intensively to ensure vulnerable individuals, families and children were provided with accommodation and support in accordance with the State's legal obligations. Their efforts ensured that Ireland was able to respond to an exceptionally challenging period while continuing to uphold its humanitarian commitments.

The reality, however, is that our asylum system was not originally designed to accommodate demand on the scale experienced in recent years. International protection applications rose significantly over a relatively short period, reaching 18,500 in 2024 alone. While important modernisation work had already been undertaken within the Department, it was increasingly clear that the challenges facing Ireland were not unique. Similar pressures were being experienced across the European Union, highlighting the need for a more co-ordinated and sustainable approach at European level.

It is in that context that the EU migration and asylum pact represents such an important milestone. As Deputies will be aware, the new International Protection Act 2026 came into effect on 12 June and constitutes the most comprehensive reform of immigration law in the history of the State. Through this legislation, Ireland has implemented the EU pact on migration and asylum, the overall objective of which is to provide a fair, sustainable and efficient asylum procedure through greater convergence in asylum practices across Europe, including standardised procedures and significantly shorter processing times. Faster decision-making is fairer for applicants, fairer for communities and strengthens confidence in the system. We are now just over 100 days into its implementation and while it remains early in the process, the experience to date demonstrates that the new framework is already delivering positive results. More than 800 first-instance decisions have been issued, while the median processing time for a first decision has reduced to just 33 days. By comparison, under the previous system, median processing times stood at approximately 12 months for standard procedures and four months for accelerated procedures.

The reforms introduced under the pact are not solely about speed but also about improving the overall quality and integrity of decision-making. Enhanced screening measures,

strengthened document verification capabilities and more effective use of electronic evidence are improving our ability to establish identity and identify vulnerabilities at an earlier stage, supporting more robust and better informed decisions. Just as important, procedural safeguards remain central to the system.

High levels of engagement with legal counselling and legal representation demonstrate that applicants are accessing and exercising their rights throughout the process while ensuring that decisions continue to be made within a framework that is fair and transparent. Of course, implementation does not end with the initial decision-making stage. The focus now is on maintaining momentum across the entire protection process, including appeals, transfers, returns and final case resolution. The objective is to ensure that improvements achieved at the front end of the system are carried through to final outcomes. Ultimately, the pact is about building an asylum system that is fairer, more predictable and more sustainable, both for applicants and for member states.

The reforms being delivered under the pact are also closely linked to the Government's wider work on accommodation. Since May 2025, my Department has been responsible for all aspects of the international protection process, including the provision of accommodation for people seeking international protection in Ireland. Under both Irish and European law, applicants are entitled to have their basic needs met while their applications are being considered, and accommodation provided through the international protection accommodation services, IPAS. It remains a central component of that responsibility.

The rapid growth in international protection applications over recent years required a corresponding expansion of accommodation capacity, much of which was delivered under emergency conditions. While those arrangements were necessary at the time, the Government's objective has always been to move towards a more sustainable and better planned model of accommodation provision. For that reason, significant investment has been made in expanding State-owned capacity through the acquisition of Citywest, the refurbishment of State-owned properties and the development of modular accommodation projects.

Alongside this, stronger oversight of revised rate card models are helping to improve consistency across the accommodation system while delivering significant savings for the Exchequer. Our long-term objective is clear: to reduce reliance on emergency responses and increase the proportion of accommodation provided directly by the State, thereby creating a more sustainable system and providing greater certainty for local communities and individuals seeking protection.

Alongside reforms within the international protection system, the Government is advancing a managed and responsible transition from temporary protection for those displaced by the war in Ukraine. The House will be aware of the extraordinary generosity demonstrated by communities throughout the country since the outbreak of that conflict. Ireland responded quickly and compassionately. On 15 July of this year, EU member states agreed to extend temporary protection for persons displaced from Ukraine until 4 March 2028. The decision provides important clarity for beneficiaries and member states while the European Union continues to support Ukraine and prepare for the eventual conclusion of the temporary protection regime. It also recognises the importance of supporting Ukraine's future recovery and reconstruction.

While that decision provides stability in the short term, the focus at European level has increasingly shifted towards planning for the future. In that regard, Ireland continues to implement the measures approved by the Government on 26 May, which are aligned with the Council recommendation of a co-ordinated approach to moving beyond temporary protection. These measures include the phased withdrawal of commercial accommodation, the development of alternative residence pathways, enhanced supports for integration and self-sufficiency, improved information provision and preparations for voluntary return and reintegration, where appropriate. That approach is already delivering tangible results. In May of this year, almost 16,000 people were residing in State-contracted commercial accommodation; today, that figure has been reduced to approximately 12,500. As contracts with certain accommodation providers conclude on a phased basis over the coming months, that transition will continue.

At the same time, appropriate arrangements have been put in place for individuals who face genuine barriers to independent living, with applications for continued support assessed on a case-by-case basis. The accommodation recognition payment continues to play an important role in supporting this response. Since its introduction in 2022, the scheme has enabled thousands of households across Ireland to provide accommodation on a humanitarian basis. Approximately 39,500 people are living in around 22,000 host properties supported through the scheme, demonstrating the remarkable generosity shown by communities throughout the country.

Looking beyond temporary protection, the Government recognises that many people who came to Ireland from Ukraine have established lives here, entered employment and contributed to their communities, and they wish to continue doing so. In recognition of that contribution, my Department has developed the temporary protection transition scheme, which opens for applications today. The scheme provides an alternative residence permission for eligible individuals who wish to establish a longer term basis for living and working in Ireland. Successful applicants will receive permission for up to two years, with provision for renewal, and time spent under that permission will count as reckonable residence for the purposes of applying for naturalisation. The scheme forms part of a broader suite of measures intended to support an orderly and sustainable transition from temporary protection while providing greater certainty for those who have already made a significant contribution to Irish society. It is important to emphasise, however, that this permission is not intended to replace temporary protection. That remains in place until March 2028, and those who do not qualify for the transition scheme will continue to benefit from temporary protection for as long as the directive remains in effect. Rather, the scheme provides an additional pathway for those who meet the eligibility criteria.

Taken together, the reforms being delivered under the EU pact on migration and asylum, the ongoing transformation of our accommodation system and the transition measures being implemented for beneficiaries of temporary protection reflect a broader objective. The Government is working to build a migration system that is fair, orderly and sustainable, one that meets our humanitarian obligations, supports integration, maintains public confidence and ensures Ireland is equipped to manage migration effectively into the future.

Successful migration policy is not simply about arrival, accommodation or legal status. It is also about integration. Integration remains a central objective of that approach and for many

people citizenship represents the culmination of a successful integration journey. Irish citizenship is a significant status that reflects a lasting commitment between an individual and the State. It is one of the most important legal relationships that can exist between an individual and the State. It brings with it important rights, opportunities and protections, but it also carries responsibilities. It represents far more than residence in Ireland. It reflects a lasting and enduring bond with this country, its people and our shared future. As citizenship represents the fullest expression of membership of Irish society, it is important that the legislative framework governing access to citizenship remain robust, fair and sustainable.

As I noted earlier, the programme for Government contains a commitment to continue implementing a firmer migration system that protects the integrity of our immigration framework. Last year, the Government approved a broad package of policy and legislative reforms of Ireland's migration system so that it remains efficient, sustainable and aligned with international best practice. As part of that wider programme of reform, we are reviewing aspects of citizenship. As legislators, it is entirely appropriate that we periodically review the legal framework governing citizenship. Our laws must continue to meet current needs, reflect international developments and support effective modern migration systems. Indeed, the Government has a responsibility to review citizenship policy and adapt its frameworks in light of changing migration patterns, demographic developments and evolving public policy objectives.

The Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, and I recently secured Government approval for the priority drafting of legislation to strengthen Ireland's naturalisation framework. The reforms being considered are intended to ensure that the pathway to citizenship by naturalisation reflects a genuine, sustained and meaningful connection to Ireland.

The general scheme of the Bill approved by the Government contains several key proposals. I would like to outline some of them. First, the scheme proposes increasing the standard residence requirement for naturalisation applicants from five years to eight years. Under the proposed model, an applicant would generally be required to demonstrate two years of continuous residence immediately before applying, together with six additional years of residence accumulated over the previous ten years. The rationale is straightforward. The rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship are significant. It is therefore reasonable that applicants demonstrate a sustained record of lawful residence.

Second, the scheme proposes that applicants demonstrate language proficiency, which is common across the European Union. That proficiency can be in English, Irish or Irish Sign Language. The objective is not to create barriers; rather, it is to support integration and ensure that citizens can participate. Importantly, the legislation would provide flexibility regarding the standard required, the method of assessment and the circumstances in which exemptions or waivers may be appropriate.

Third, the scheme proposes the introduction of a civics, society and politics requirement. This reflects the principle that citizenship involves active participation in life in the State. Understanding how our institutions operate, the rights we enjoy and the responsibilities we share helps to strengthen social cohesion and encourage active citizenship. We will ensure that any testing regime is proportionate, fair, accessible and transparent, and supports meaningful participation in Irish civic life without creating unnecessary barriers to naturalisation. The objective is not to reward educational achievement but to ensure individuals can navigate daily

life, communicate effectively with their communities, participate fully in the workplace and perform the important duties of citizens, including voting and, where called upon, jury service.

The scheme also proposes measures relating to self-sufficiency. The objective is to promote independence and support positive integration outcomes. It is important to note that the detailed operation of these provisions would be determined through regulations following consultation with relevant Departments and stakeholders. These changes would provide greater clarity regarding the categories of residence that may be counted towards naturalisation and would provide that certain temporary permissions and schemes, including residence under the temporary protection directive, would not be reckonable for citizenship purposes.

These proposals should be considered in the broader European context. Some commentary has suggested that Ireland would become an outlier if the reforms were enacted. That is simply not the case. Citizenship policy is ultimately a matter for each sovereign state. Across Europe, countries have adopted different pathways to naturalisation, but almost all require applicants to demonstrate a substantial period of lawful residence and, in many cases, some degree of language competence and civic understanding. Fourteen EU member states require eight years or more of residence before naturalisation. Ireland is currently the only EU member state that does not require language competence. Civic integration requirements are also common across Europe. Taken together, these proposals would bring Ireland more closely into line with established European practice.

While we are discussing changes to citizenship policy, it is important to acknowledge the significant work undertaken in recent years to improve the operation of the naturalisation system. The number of citizenship applications received in recent years has increased substantially. Improvements in digital processes, enhanced operational capacity and ongoing reforms have enabled the Department to process applications more efficiently.

Citizenship ceremonies play an important role and I have been pleased to attend a number of them. The pride, commitment and sense of belonging demonstrated by those taking the declaration of fidelity to the nation at a citizenship ceremony is valued by people at home and around the world.

In conclusion, I recognise we are undertaking a series of major changes but at the heart of it the objective of the proposals is to have a firm, fair and balanced system of migration.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo faoi imirce agus saoránacht. Migration is a critical area of public policy that must be got right. Setting the terms of Irish citizenship is a matter of fundamental importance. Citizenship should reward integration and contribution to our communities and our country. Citizenship laws should be connected to a wider immigration framework but remain distinct. A migration strategy must be underpinned by the needs of the country, recognising capacity challenges in housing and public services, our capacity to integrate those who come here and the need for a humanitarian response to those fleeing war and persecution. Citizenship laws are about ensuring that people who have legally been here on a long-term basis, made Ireland their home and integrated into their communities are provided with a clear pathway to belong. Our citizenship laws should never be the reason to come to Ireland. They should be the route for those legally and permanently resident here to become part of the Irish nation.

The truth is that there has been a failure to plan and develop a coherent migration strategy. Rather than deciding what is in our best interests and planning accordingly, policy has been driven by short-term decisions. Student permission numbers have been driven by the needs of language schools and cash-strapped colleges. Employment permits have been driven by the needs of sectors whose skills shortages Governments have failed to adequately plan for, with no account of pressures on housing and public services. Then there is the dysfunction that has marked the international protection system. These failures have created chaos, increased tensions and undermined social cohesion in a way that was entirely avoidable.

Sinn Féin wants a fair, strong and efficient migration system. Migration management, including work permits and student permissions, must take account of capacity for integration and of housing and public services. It is time to move towards migration management on an all-Ireland basis. This makes sense for Ireland - more sense than signing up to an EU pact that failed to recognise the unique challenges arising from the common travel area with a state outside of the EU. Sinn Féin has called for faster international protection processing, effective and tracked deportations, an end to profiteering and stronger supports for integration. The record backlog that is now within the IPAS appeals system and the continued poor enforcement of decisions where a person has no right to remain raise huge concerns. IPAS centres should not be located in areas that are already lacking services, facilities and investment. There has to be a meaningful engagement with communities. The temporary protection directive was introduced as an emergency response when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. It was envisaged as a short-term emergency measure lasting a maximum of three years. The expectation was that conditions would allow people either to safely return or to move into other legal statuses within a relatively short period. Instead, the Government has agreed to one extension after another, creating unnecessary uncertainty for Ukrainians and pressures on our services and resources.

Confidence in the migration system depends on key principles. First, there must be a fair system with clear rules that are consistently enforced and clear consequences when those rules are breached. The system should not be categorised by delays of permit renewals or asylum applications. Second, migration policy must be guided by robust data, transparency and proper planning. Decisions should take account of the capacity in housing and public services, integration and community resources while also addressing the skills and workforce needs. Finally, deportation orders must be enforced once due process has been exhausted and particularly for those involved in serious criminality. Failure on all these fronts undermines the integrity of the system, erodes public confidence and unfairly damages the perception of the overwhelming majority of migrants, who have made a positive contribution to our society.

Caithfimid luach a chur ar shaoránacht na hÉireann. Sinn Féin believes that Irish citizenship is something to be valued. It signifies membership of our nation. It carries rights and responsibilities and should reflect the genuine and lasting commitment to Ireland. International experience shows that successful integration is best achieved through a clear, transparent and fair pathway to citizenship, one that encourages civic participation, community involvement and a genuine connection to the country. Changes to citizenship rules can create uncertainty for those seeking to become Irish citizens, while delays in renewing residence permissions also contribute to unnecessary anxiety for many people.

As citizenship applications grow, it is right that we examine whether the current system is fit for purpose and properly reflects the significance of Irish citizenship. The current system relies heavily on time spent in the State, broad ministerial discretion and very unclear rules. Time spent in Ireland matters, but in and of itself, it is not a measure of integration contribution or commitment to Irish society. Citizenship should be acquired through a structured and transparent process that reflects both the privileges and responsibilities that come with it. Sinn Féin supports stronger, clearer and more consistent citizenship rules. Citizenship should not just be reduced to a passport acquired simply through the passage of time or a privilege reserved for the wealthy. Emphasis has to be put on integration, civic participation, community involvement and an understanding of Irish society, including an ability in Irish, English or Irish Sign Language. Sinn Féin also wants a clear pathway to Irish citizenship for people who are legally resident in the North where they meet the same conditions applied elsewhere on this island, recognising that this nation goes beyond the Twenty-six Counties of this State. People who have lawfully built their lives in Ireland but who may not want or qualify for citizenship should also be able to access secure, long-term residence. This is something that we will be engaging with the Minister on. The transitional arrangements also need to be considered for those who have established their lives here under the existing rules and had legitimate expectations about when they would qualify for citizenship based on their reckonable residence.

I wish to make it clear that Sinn Féin wants to see a managed migration system, one that ensures that we do not see existing communities isolated or removed from decisions that affect the area where they live, one where permit and visa numbers take account of the capacity to integrate and the pressures on housing and public services. We have to recognise that many communities have seen huge population increases in a fairly short timeframe and in a completely unplanned way. This has impacted on cohesion, community relations, housing demand and public services capacity. It has led to resentment and anger. The dysfunctional IPAS system, marred by delays and inefficiency, has resulted in huge profits for a small number of private operators but completely failed local communities and those fleeing war and persecution. The handling of the Ukrainian temporary protection system pitted people against each other, providing supports to one cohort that were denied to everyone else, including struggling Irish families. These failures taken together mean that many within the public have lost trust in the migration system. Our communities have been let down, as have those who have moved here legally wanting nothing more than what is best for their families, who have often been subject to unacceptable racism and intolerance.

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael must take responsibility for this. Sinn Féin wants to address this through the delivery of an all-Ireland migration management system. We have brought forward policies to improve the current system and we will be bringing forward others. I say all of this because every day I am shown an online post that misrepresents my party's position, with self-declared patriots and nationalists with their self-promoting videos decrying Sinn Féin's non-existent open borders policy. These actors are not representative of ordinary people, who in many cases have genuine issues with how migration is managed and have every right to be heard on these issues. Those people I described lock arm in arm with the worst extremes of British colonial racists. They take advantage of Government failings. They take advantage of the chaos, profiteering and lack of engagement with communities, not to attack Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, which are responsible, but instead to try to create a wedge between working-class

people and Sinn Féin. Of course, this week, when an actual Irish nationalist working-class community on the Garvaghy Road is under siege, these carpet baggers are nowhere to be found. They are more likely, in fact, to be seen drinking with the UDA in a loyalist bar than standing all night in the rain with the nationalist community of the Garvaghy Road, who are trying to defend their right to live free from sectarian intimidation. They are the real Irish patriots.

The days of misrepresenting Sinn Féin are over. The people can see who has the backs of the Irish working class. We will always proudly and unashamedly stand with our communities, North and South. We are for Irish unity. We are for the working people of Ireland. We are for a managed and fair migration system that treats everyone with dignity and respect but does not dismiss the concerns or pressures on existing communities, that sees Irish citizenship as something to be valued and that rewards integration and contribution. We are for a country that does not force our young people to travel in the opposite direction as the only hope for a home. We are for giving people a break from the cost-of-living crisis. We are for the Irish Republic, and we will not allow any west Brit self-declared patriots to misrepresent us ever again.

3 o'clock

Deputy David Cullinane: I start by acknowledging the hugely positive contribution that many people who have come from outside of Ireland to live here have played. I say that as Sinn Féin's health spokesperson, obviously deeply conscious of all of those who work in our hospitals and in primary and community care settings. Our healthcare system simply would not function if it was not for many people who have come from outside of the country on work permits. They were welcomed into Ireland and are necessary to help us deal with the challenges we have in the healthcare system but also to make sure people get the healthcare and treatment they need. I thank each and every one of them and everybody who works in our health services.

The Minister of State made the point that the question is not about whether immigration happens. It does happen. It happens in every country. It is a fact of life. The question is how it is managed. This is a point of departure from where my party stands and, I would argue, the track record of the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Government. I do not believe it has properly managed the migration system. The impact of that has been that many people have lost confidence. They do not see the system as working. They see the profiteering. They see the inequalities in it at times. People who work or live in working-class communities can see that they are the ones who are always asked to do the heavy lifting when the resources are often not there. In fact, these communities are very welcoming. Lots of promises are made in relation to additional resources and capacity but it never follows though. That creates resentment and anger and it creates opportunities for some of those so-called false patriots Deputy Carthy talked about who pedal mistruths about Sinn Féin's position every single day. However, they are not representative of the vast majority of decent working-class people who are welcoming of those who are genuinely coming into Ireland seeking to work and fleeing oppression and war and so on. They want to be welcoming.

The issue is whether we are properly managing our migration system. For those of us who believe in a rules-based system, which I do although I do not know the position of every political party in this House, the rules have to be applied. As difficult at times as that may be for some people, the rules have to be applied. You cannot say you want a managed migration

system and a rules-based system but then turn a blind eye to the rules not being implemented. That is also what creates resentment among communities. They want the system to be fair, as I do. They want a system which is efficient, as I do, but they also want a system which is enforced.

When I talk about a fair system, I mean a fair system for those who are seeking to come to Ireland as well. Any migration system has to be underpinned by human rights, equality and all of the international obligations we have signed up to, but also has to be fair to communities. It has to be fair in not having a two-tier system of immigration - which we have seen as well and that has also caused problems - where some who come into Ireland are treated differently from others. That position is unsustainable and also creates difficulties and tensions. I want a fair system but when I talk about an efficient system, that means we do not have people coming here and then waiting years and years for an application to be processed. Despite the fact that this has been said over and over again in this House, and promises have been made about speeding up the system and more resources and staff, the reality is it still takes far too long. That undermines the very rules-based system and the "managed migration system" the Minister of State said he wants to see. It should not take years for an application to be examined, yet it does. The enforced part of it is that if somebody applies for international protection and is refused they should be returned home safely. It should not be controversial to say that. It is not right wing. I have to challenge and push back against those who make those arguments. As I said, we cannot have it both ways. We cannot say we want a managed system but then do not want to see it enforced.

I also believe we need to have a bilateral agreement with Britain and a returns policy. We have to make sure we are protecting the island of Ireland and ensure we are doing greater checks when it comes to people who are coming into and onto the island of Ireland and moving between different parts of the island. That will also require stronger arrangements with Britain.

I will finish where I started. I welcome and acknowledge the hugely positive contribution that so many immigrants have played, and will continue to play, in Ireland, but I also acknowledge that people want that managed system to be in place, to be working effectively and fairly and they do not see that at this point.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: I normally do not contribute to these debates on justice and migration but I have come to speak on this issue because I am deeply concerned about the direction of the policies the Minister of State and the Government are taking. They have lost their way and it is deeply concerning. I am also deeply concerned about the anti-migrant rhetoric we hear on different sides of the House from national leaders. Migrants who come to Ireland make an extraordinary contribution to our society in so many ways.

It is important for us to remember that the story of Ireland is in many ways a story of migration. For thousands of years people have come and moved to this island in different waves of migration. In century after century, people have come and have lived here to make a better life. All of us, if we look at our ancestors and trace it back, have migrated from somewhere to be here. In many ways, the story of Ireland is a story of migration and of leaving this island to live elsewhere. I grew up in the west of Ireland and like many other families from there, generation after generation, people left and migrated to make better lives elsewhere. My great-grandparents went to New York back in the 1920s; I have grand-uncles and grand-aunts

all around the world; my uncle lives in Canada; I have an aunty in London; my siblings went to Australia during the financial crash; and I lived in the UK. Many other families across Ireland have that experience of migration, of moving from here, seeking a better life and establishing themselves in other countries. We cannot forget that and how crucial that story is to our national identity and to who we are. I urge the Government to rethink its strategy and its approach to migration.

I was talking to two men in my constituency who moved here from Orbán's Hungary. They moved here to make a better life in Ireland and did all of the things they were told to do. They got really good jobs and paid lots of taxes. They bought a house. They pay their property tax and their TV licence. They contribute to the local society. They got involved in clubs and societies. They made friends and they learned the language. They came here with good English but they learned even more. They feel like they have done everything right. They have done everything they were told to do, but suddenly the Government is pulling the rug from under them. They came here four and a half years ago. They were looking forward to applying for citizenship in January. Now, they feel like they are not welcome because of the policies that are pursued by the Minister of State and the Government.

I urge the Minister of State to rethink the strategy. He should rethink the message we are sending to the people who have come to this country and who have made an extraordinary contribution to Irish life. What message is being sent to them? What they are hearing from the Minister of State and his pronouncements is that they are not welcome here, and that is wrong. It is particularly wrong, given our history of migration and given that we have left this island in our millions. We need to rethink this plan and this strategy because the Minister of State has got it wrong.

Deputy Jen Cummins: The role of migrants in this country, as my colleague has said, is so important. We go, people come - that is how it is. Our hospitals would not exist without people coming from all over the world. How would our restaurants manage? I would like to mention teachers who are coming here, people who want to set up life here because it is a great place to live. They want to work as teachers but it is incredibly difficult because the pathway through the Teaching Council is incredibly difficult. That is something we need to consider. We need to mature as a country, when we have people coming from elsewhere, as to how they can become teachers within our country. We want to broaden out that career for everybody. We want to make sure that those young people and their parents who are coming from migrant backgrounds can see teachers from other countries, not just from our own.

The categorisation of human beings is quite difficult. My own husband is a migrant. He came here because he loved Ireland. He thinks it is fantastic. However, there is a categorisation of who comes here and who is allowed to stay based on colour, where they come from, social class and lots of different things. We need to get a grip on that because as climate change happens there will be more and more people who come here. There will be more and more people who will have to come here. We only saw that from the heat in Europe this summer. People were dying because of that heat. We have a lovely temperature here, although it was also very hot. We are going to see that necessarily happening.

I will end on a positive note. The Minister of State was there at my husband's naturalisation ceremony in Killarney this year and it was an absolutely amazing day.

Over the course of that day, over 4,500 people became Irish citizens. As Deputy Rice said, since the new announcement has been made, a lot of people have come to my clinics to plead that they are here. They want to make a life here. They want to be citizens of this amazing country. We need to have a fair, humane and evidence-based approach to how we do naturalisation and immigration.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I welcome today's opportunity to discuss migration and citizenship because although this is an issue that dominated public discourse in 2024 when we were all engaged in the election, it has receded somewhat given the geopolitical tensions that are abounding and the energy and cost-of-living crises. I just do not think we are simply talking about it enough, particularly in light of the actions of this Government since it came in. I feel very strongly that we have seen a series of cruel, performative measures which are set out to create a picture of this Government being tough on immigration without reasoned evidence. That to me is the hallmark of the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan's ministership so far. When we try to dig for an understanding as to why these measures are being introduced, there is no evidence for them and that to me is part of what we talk about when we talk about these cruel and performative measures.

I am proud to be part of a pro-immigration party. It is not easy because the other thing we have to call out right now is the rise of fascism and anti-immigrant sentiment, not just in Ireland but the world over. Before I became a politician, I was heavily involved in the work around human rights and equality, particularly on the topic of international protection. I can tell the Minister of State that groups such as Doras and the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, MRCI, that are fighting for migrant rights and people in the international protection system, and defending the right to claim asylum, come under huge attack, but it all pales into insignificance compared to the overt racism and discrimination experienced by migrants in this country. That is the context in which the Government has chosen to take this direction in its term of office in terms of migration and citizenship.

I talk about cruel decisions. The one we are dealing with in the Government's current strategy around moving from five to eight years is just ridiculous. It is five years already, plus another two years by the time it is processed, so that is seven years. Moving it to eight years is essentially moving it to ten. These are people who are contributing to our society. They are paying taxes. They are working. They are integrating and the Government is simply moving the goalposts on them. People who had expectations around when they were going to have citizenship have had their lives upturned by this decision. I urge the Minister of State to rethink it. Believe me, I want the Government to reverse the decision, but at the very least offer those people who are already in the system the clarity and consistency that they expect on their naturalisation path towards citizenship in this country.

It is a cruel decision, but it builds on multiple cruel decisions the Government has overseen in terms of harder rules around family reunification and the asylum and migration process, which the Social Democrats believes pose major threats to people's ability to claim asylum in this country and the international protection process itself. The Minister of State talks about the system being "firm" and "sustainable", and all of those words always go before "fair", but our system was never fair. We never even reached the conditions we were supposed to meet under the reception and integration directive of the European Union before we moved towards this more "firm" and "sustainable" model.

However, the worst part of all of this is that it is such a waste and suck of energy. I worked in the international protection space. Part of the changes that the Government is looking at now is around the threshold for earnings, for example. I know it is a separate system but it is related to the same area. When the right to work in the international protection system was introduced by a preceding government that included the Minister of State's party, it was chaos because the thresholds did not make any sense. All of these NGOs that I mentioned had to fight to get a proper realisation of the right for people in the international protection system to work. Even then, most people could not realise that right because they did not have access to a driver's licence or bank accounts. All of the energy in the organisation that I worked in, which is a State organisation, plus the entire migrant rights sector, is being placed into pushing back against the Government's regressive measures, instead of where it should be going, which is the actual integration of these people who are holding up our hospitals and our health system. They are people who we are neighbours, friends and family with.

The Government's cruel measures are making life more difficult for them every single day that it chooses to take this tough on immigration stance that is "firm" and "sustainable" while failing to implement anything of the fair and rights-based system that it should be looking over.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I welcome these statements and thank the Minister of State for his work to date. Irish citizenship is one of the most important things this State can confer. It is a legal status, a bond with the country and a commitment to its future. I welcome the general scheme of the Irish nationality and citizenship (amendment) Bill. Eight years' residence instead of five, language and civics tests and, importantly, a requirement to be self-sufficient are not unusual. Austria, Italy, Spain and Slovenia require ten years, and most member states test language and civic knowledge. That matters because an Irish passport is also a European passport. It carries the right to live, work, study and vote in the local and European elections across the Union, so our standards should be in line with our partners.

However, reform must also be fair. Many people came here on work permits. They are nurses in our hospitals, carers in our nursing homes and staff in our businesses. They played by the rules as they were and I welcome the assurance that they will be fair. I ask the Minister of State to give consideration to those who are already here though.

More generally, I welcome the continued progress on the asylum backlog. Since the International Protection Act commenced in June, new applications are being decided within six months or three months under the border procedure. Daily applications are down almost 40%. Last year, 4,700 deportation orders were signed, almost double that of the year before. More than 2,100 people left the State through deportation or voluntary means. Where someone has an unsuccessful application, they must be returned to their country of origin. That gives the asylum system credibility and protects it for those who genuinely need our protection. We must keep speeding up processing times, clear the cases already in the system and strengthen our borders.

At European level, I welcome this summer's agreement on the new return regulation. I hope to see progress on the return hubs and I welcome the Minister of State's position on them. We also share a common travel area with the UK and I welcome the Minister's engagement with the home secretary on protecting it. It is only by working together with our EU partners and the UK that we can deal with the challenges this presents.

I have two asks for the Minister of State. First, that clear transitional arrangements for those already living and working here are set out early, so they can plan with certainty. Second, that the Department publish quarterly figures on processing times and returns under the new Act, so this House can track progress. The system should be fair to those who play by the rules, firm with those who do not and in step with our European partners

Deputy John Clendennen: I start by sending my sympathies to the families and loved ones of father and daughter, Mihai Chinez and Denisa Mihaela Chinez, who tragically lost their lives in a workplace accident in Banagher on Monday. It has left an entire community sad and in shock at a very difficult time. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha dílse.

Migration and citizenship are issues that we all need to be able to have an open, mature and honest conversation about, and not name calling across the Chamber. We can recognise and welcome contributions that many people who come to Ireland make to our economy and communities. At the same time, we can acknowledge that migration needs to be properly managed with appropriate rules governing our immigration system that are actively enforced. Those two things are not contradictory. Ireland must always remain an open and welcoming country, and a place of compassion, fairness and opportunity. Openness must go hand in hand with order, accountability and public confidence.

People have come here from across the world and are working in hospitals, nursing homes, transport, technology and agriculture. We also have industries that need more resources, such as the shortage of heavy goods vehicle, HGV, and bus mechanics. We have an obligation to identify where genuine skill shortages need to be addressed and allow our economy to recruit those needed, while at the same time protecting our employment standards and the opportunities for those already living here.

Public confidence cannot be taken for granted. Our confidence in legal migration is inevitably linked to public confidence in our wider immigration and international protection systems.

Rules should mean something, be adhered to and enforced. The recent reform of our migration system now means that enhanced identity and security screening, biometric registration as well as clearer timelines on applications are implemented. It is fair but firm and this is the right approach. A person who genuinely needs international protection should not have to spend years waiting for an answer. Equally, where it is found that a person does not have a right to stay in Ireland, that decision must lead to action.

I have raised in the past the issue of foreign nationals who commit serious criminal offences in this country. My position is clear on that. They should face justice, just like any Irish national who commits a crime. People who come to Ireland must obey the laws, work, raise families and contribute meaningfully to our society and should be treated with respect and fairness but we must be capable of responding robustly to those who commit serious crime.

I return to the word "confidence". The public must have confidence in our immigration system. Confidence comes from and is facilitated by strong communication. This Government must communicate clearly and regularly, with identified metrics that can give us timelines and trends in relation to how these initiatives are unfolding for the benefit of our society. In my own county of Offaly recently, there were rumours of an IPAS centre being opened in a very

rural area. I engaged with the Minister of State and it was firmly put to bed very quickly that there were no such plans but information suggesting otherwise had travelled quickly and caused concern. We see this today in relation to housing allocations, voting rights, and economic benefits and we really need to get a handle on this so that the facts are out there. My priority throughout this process has been simple. Communities are entitled to accurate information and legitimate concerns deserve answers. We must strive to never let speculation replace facts. We cannot allow myths, misinformation or disinformation to become a substitute for the facts.

Irish citizenship is of enormous value. For generations, Irish people have travelled to countries all across the globe. We know what migration means for both sides and today people come here to build their lives in our communities. I understand the eight-year rule that the Minister is introducing but I would ask him to give consideration to some individuals who have been in the system, who have made Ireland their home and who are now finding that they will have to extend their time.

Deputy Shane Moynihan: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on migration and citizenship. One of my biggest regrets of the past few years is that in the social media age there is a tendency to run immediately to the black or white. Immigration policy has fallen into a trap whereby there is little nuance afforded to it in public debate and everything gets into lumped into one bucket or the other. A lot of the discussion that happened during 2024 and 2025 characterises that problem in particular. It is incumbent on us, as public representatives, to strive to ensure that there is nuance in our discussions on the various aspects of immigration policy.

I represent Dublin Mid-West, possibly one of the most multicultural constituencies in the State. I attend events hosted by new communities in my constituency as an honoured guest and am privileged to do so. I am very proud to be able to represent many of those people, many of whom have acquired citizenship. One of the most touching things a public representative can get is an email from one of those new citizens saying that they had their citizenship ceremony last week and thanking us for being part of their journey. That reminds us of the importance of citizenship in and of itself. Some aspects of the reforms that are being put forward are welcome, including the opportunity for people to articulate what they have learned and integrated in terms of our values and our civic system. Honouring both of our national languages is something that we should be celebrating as well. However, like other speakers, I would say there are people in our State at the moment who came here and who started on the citizenship journey. They are very far along that journey and their circumstances need to be taken into account. I would welcome discussion around the extension from five to eight years to see what is the basis for it, without prejudice, necessarily, but to understand the reasoning behind it.

There is one aspect of this that I want to draw attention to, which is the importance of integration and of funding streams like the new communities fund that allow for the integration of new communities. I want to pay tribute, in particular, to our sports clubs which are at the forefront of integrating new communities into our society. In my own son's soccer club, a number of the coaches coaching teams are people who were not born in Ireland but came here to make their home. This is a classic example of the integration that we need to promote. However, it is important that we in this House remember that integration does not just happen;

it is something that needs to be fostered and led by the State and incentivised through support for community groups.

Finally, on our immigration system, delays in the processing of visas and the paperwork and bureaucracy associated with that needs to be addressed. The system needs to be resourced adequately. I know of one bus company in this country that has had to go abroad to hire bus drivers but because of the delays in getting visas for those drivers, it is not able to provide the level of service required.

Again, I emphasise the point that there are many nuances to the discussion around immigration, citizenship and migration. It is important that in our debates on it, we do not try to other the other side but try to engage with those particular aspects of nuance.

Deputy Paul Donnelly: Sinn Féin wants a strong, fair and efficient migration system that serves the interests of the people of this State as well as those fleeing war and persecution. I have lived in Dublin West for the past 30 years and I have seen it grow into one of the most diverse communities in this State and it is our strength. However, we must move towards the management of our migration system on an all-Ireland basis. This makes absolute common sense and would have huge benefits in the long term. Migration is another incredibly important reason for having a Border poll as soon as possible. The British State should not have control of any part of our borders.

We want the management of migration and the issuing of work permits and student permissions to take into account issues such as the ability to house and integrate those who come here and the availability of public services. How can we be encouraging people to come here to work and study if housing is not available to them or it costs up to 60% or 70% of their wages? For some who are here, working and contributing, there are serious issues with the system. How can people be expected to support themselves when the State allows them to remain in Ireland but administrative delays prevent them from working? We have people who have followed every single rule. They have applied to renew their IRP and change their immigration permission before the existing permission expired but they have to wait for months for the underlying application to be processed while being left without the ability to earn an income. This is not merely an administrative inconvenience; it means lost wages, suspended employment, lost jobs and sometimes even the loss of a place to live. It is particularly concerning for international graduates who are trying to remain in the country lawfully and find employment in their field of study. These are people who we need in this country to keep our health services going.

The Minister previously indicated in reply to a parliamentary question that extensions of student conditions were granted only on compassionate grounds. However, a recent FOI response appears to indicate that extensions may also be available to graduates who are still seeking employment in their field. I ask the Minister to clarify this apparent discrepancy and publish clear and consistent guidance. We also cannot continue to rely on temporary bridging arrangements around Christmas and summertime. This is an issue of fairness. The State proposes an income threshold for citizenship but how can people demonstrate financial independence when the State's own processing delays prevent them from working? People who applied lawfully and on time should not be financially punished because their application is sitting in a queue. I call on the Minister to establish a permanent bridging mechanism that

protects eligible applicants' employment rights while their applications are being processed. Administrative delays should never be a barrier to people's ability to work, pay their rent, support their families and, more importantly, contribute to Ireland. We need these people.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: What the Minister is proposing in relation to these citizenship changes is nothing more than performative cruelty. There is no evidence for this because if the evidence existed, then the Minister would publish it. He has not done so and he will not do so. The people we are talking about are, in the main, highly skilled. Many of them are doctors, other healthcare workers, engineers and so on and the Government is going to leave many of them in a grey area, in immigration uncertainty, for longer than they need to be. That is not acceptable and, in my opinion, it is shameful. I suspect that these changes might have more to do with the Minister for justice's protracted Fianna Fáil shadow-leadership election than they do with actually dealing with immigration and migration properly.

The Government is destroying another pathway to social integration instead of supporting it. I have been contacted by so many people in my constituency, including doctors, software engineers and tech workers, who told me they are really worried. Many of them are quite far along the pathway under the existing rules. At the bare minimum, they need a transitional arrangement. This is a cruel thing to do to people. Also cruel is the way the Minister just said this is changing, like it or lump it, while the Taoiseach is saying, "Sure we might do something at some stage". We need clarity from the Government on this issue. It is not just a simple technical change. It affects people who live, work and have built their lives here, who are here legally and lawfully and who contribute so much to our economy and society. They should not be held in immigration uncertainty for a longer period.

To speak in language the Government might actually listen to, this is something that could damage our economy and our competitiveness. It is very depressing, when the Overton window in this country has moved so much in terms of immigration and migration, to see the Government, in effect, chasing something it will not catch and trying to satiate people it will not be able to satiate. Many of those the changes will affect people who came here as critical skills workers through the stamp 4 process. They have spent their lives here. If they were to up sticks and leave, our health service could potentially collapse. Citizenship should not depend on income, because the income threshold will disproportionately affect people in lower paid but valuable employment - such as care workers; people whose jobs we could not fill if they did not do them - and also people with disabilities.

Extending the pathway should not involve an arbitrary cliff-edge deadline. At the bare minimum, we need a transitional arrangement. I ask the Government to put in place a transitional provision to protect people who are here lawfully, including people on stamp 4 permits or employment permits. The goalposts should not be moved on them midway through the process. It is not fair. They should be assessed according to the rules under which they came to Ireland. This is about fairness and ensuring people who came here and followed the rules as they were laid out when they came are not simply told, when they are some bit of the way along, that the requirement is going up to eight or ten years. That is not fair.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this topic. I have been receiving a significant amount of correspondence in recent weeks, as, I am sure, have all TDs, on the proposed citizenship changes. I am totally against the changes to the residency period

requirement to apply for citizenship. They are totally unnecessary. This is an attempt by the Government to appease a vocal minority.

On a personal level, my best friend, Amir, who came to Ireland from Tunisia three years ago, despite opportunities to study in France, Germany and the Netherlands, is currently doing a PhD in chemical engineering and air quality at UCC. Over the past three years, Amir has represented Ireland on several occasions in Europe, speaking about the work UCC and Ireland are doing on air quality and climate change. This demonstrates that immigrants to Ireland provide invaluable contributions - in this case, in scientific research. Immigrants like him, who provide a vital resource to Ireland, are in the situation when they complete their studies of having built up no residency requirement credit. That is a disgrace. Ukrainians are in the same scenario, with their time here not counting towards citizenship. How on earth does four years of scientific research on behalf of the State count for nothing? How does five years working in our health service count for nothing? We are going to lose these people to other European countries. When the realisation of what that means comes, it will be too late.

People who have come to Ireland for refuge from war or famine and immigrants who come here to work and have a better life should never be scapegoated for the failures of the State. Immigrants did not cause the housing crisis. Greed, landlordism and the failures of successive governments caused it. Immigrants did not cause a stagnation in wages while the cost of living soared. The free market and government neglect caused that. Immigrants did not cause young Irish people to emigrate. That was brought about by the economy successive governments created. I absolutely acknowledge my party's involvement, while in government, in failing to stem emigration from Ireland.

For the Government to use citizenship in this way, to appease the anti-emigrant sentiment that is present in Ireland, is utterly disgraceful. The Minister of State and his colleagues should be absolutely ashamed of what they are doing. I hope he hears me when I say that they cannot out-far-right the far right. That never works and they will not win because the far right is not reasonable. Of course, it would not be the first time that the other party in government, Fianna Fáil, did not stand with immigrants and instead chose to scapegoat them to appease racist sentiment. The 2004 referendum, with its associated fearmongering and dog-whistling campaign, stripped Irish-born children of foreign-born parents of birthright citizenship. An inscription inside the Irish passport states: "It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born on the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish nation." That is what it says on our passports but it is a lie. I am proud that the Labour Party stood against the 2004 referendum. We likewise stand against the changes being discussed today. We are proudly an anti-racist party and we will defend the rights of all workers in Ireland and all the people of Ireland, no matter the circumstances of their birth.

It is worth noting some of the facts. Some 80% of the population usually resident in Ireland is Irish born. Approximately 87% of the population is white. Non-Irish citizens make up only 15% of the population. Ireland has between 70,000 and 163,000 empty homes. We are at full employment, with approximately 30,000 job vacancies. Ireland is in no way overrun, as some would suggest. My staff and I deal with multiple immigration cases every single week. It is not easy to come to Ireland to work and it is not easy to stay here. It takes a significant civic engagement.

We need immigrants. We should welcome those who have made a life here for themselves, contributed to our society and worked in our State services. They should be given céad míle fáilte, not be faced with a stern Department of justice trying to appease bigots. I remind the House of a statement by the founder of the Labour Party, James Connolly: "Let no Irishman cast a stone at the foreigner; he may hit his own clansman."

Deputy Malcolm Byrne: I am strongly in support of any individual who wants to come to Ireland, make a home here, work and contribute to our society. I count many such among my friends in my community. People who have come from Europe and beyond have found a home in my home town of Gorey, which is a wonderful place to live. They have made a life here. When they want to become a citizen, they are quite keen to contribute. They want to make sure they can go out and vote. They get involved in local community organisations. We need to recognise that.

Colleagues talked about different sectors of the economy. International workers now make up more than 15% of the HSE workforce and 23% of our nurses and midwives, with 42% of our doctors having been trained internationally. In the hospitality sector, 45% of workers come from overseas.

With me being from Wexford, it will not surprise the House that my first summer job was picking strawberries. It is really difficult now to get any Irish person to work in the horticulture sector. If we look at the proportions from the most recent Teagasc study, which is nearly ten years old, it found that 77% of those in horticulture came from overseas. For those at the baseline, in other words, picking the fruit and vegetables, it was 87%. In all sectors of the economy, from high-value workers to making sure that we have fruit and vegetables on our tables, we are seeing people coming to this country to contribute.

Citizenship should not be given away easily, of that I have no doubt. There have to be standards expected of anyone who comes here. We have to have what is called a firm but fair immigration policy. However, fairness is needed to recognise those who want to come to Ireland and who have contributed towards this country.

I have a particular concern about the proposal to extend the residency period from five to eight years. I have constituents and friends who may already have started in the system or have not yet applied for citizenship and often have Irish partners. They are very concerned about these proposals. I welcomed the step forward when the Taoiseach said that for those who are already here, the extension to eight years will not be implemented. I ask the Minister of State to clarify that. It would send out an important message to those already in Ireland if the five-year requirement were to continue. Our student population, particularly the research population, can benefit enormously from bringing in international strength from around the world.

I happen to be very proud of my party's tradition of being a welcoming and inclusive party. There are people who are not Irish who have taken a very active role in my party. It was founded by people with surnames like De Valera, Lemass, and Markievicz. This is a very clear recognition of the contribution of people from various backgrounds to the foundation of the State. While we need to have a proper immigration policy, it needs to be fair and to recognise the contribution of migrants to our shores.

Deputy Paula Butterly: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this topic. Listening to some of the debate, there seems to be a muddying of the waters as to what we are proposing in relation to citizenship and then the discussion in regards to migration. Ireland has always been a welcoming nation. However, over the last couple of years, we have realised that we need to have a firm and fair system to deal with the challenges coming down the line. Through the work of the Government and its Ministers, reforms have been implemented and we are now seeing the benefits. We have always recognised that those who have come to Ireland and joined our communities and workforce have been welcomed and they are necessary. Never more than now, with an ageing population, we need more people like that coming into our country, being part of our community and participating in our political parties. Fine Gael also has a very large representation of diversity within the party, and we are very proud of that. We would welcome more people to join the party. That is the political broadcast finished for now.

At the same time, it has to be recognised that citizenship is not a right, but a privilege. People need to strive for it and work at it and ultimately be proud of it. It should never be taken for granted. This is what is being proposed in the Bill. We are acknowledging that people are working here and would like to establish a life here. Like their children, they would like to be citizens. There is no problem in my mind with extending the timeframe. What is the issue, whether it is five years or eight years, when the goal we are talking about is a lifetime?

Like Deputy Byrne Malcolm Byrne, I too had summer jobs. Unfortunately, I was not from Wexford. I am from County Louth, so my summers were spent picking wild oats and potatoes. Nowadays we do not have in the countryside people coming in looking for summer jobs. We do not have the migrants and local young people are not coming to do this.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny made a valid point, though I perhaps would not have used the same terminology. We have graduates coming in now, and while I would not extend it to all undergraduates, I think there is a valid argument to be made - and I hope it would be considered - that if postgraduates are here doing research in any subject through an approved institution, after that, if it is three, four or five years, those two years or three years of study be taken into consideration and be part of the residency rule. It seems a little unfair, if they have chosen to stay here to study and then contribute to society, that we would not recognise those years.

Deputy Barry Ward: This country does not function without foreign workers. If the people who come here to give us the benefit of their expertise, hard work and experience were to leave, we would not have a healthcare sector, hospitality sector or tech sector. Let us put that to bed straight away. We need people to come here, and we are incredibly lucky that we have a coterie of hard-working people who are willing to come and make their lives here by contributing to our communities, society and economy. This is why I think the use of words like "racist" is incredibly unhelpful. If we are to have a civil and reasonable dialogue about the issues in these statements, bandying around words like "racist" is really unhelpful. The reality is that it is not racist to ask that we reconsider our migration policy and change it in a way that reflects reality. We are changing it in a way that we need to change it. That is not a racist policy. That is a reasonable policy evaluation that should happen in any country and we should have a discussion that is not based on name-calling and accusations.

That said, I fundamentally disagree with the proposal to change the basis on which citizenship by naturalisation would come about. In my opinion, we do not need to increase it

to eight years. It does not bring us in line with Europe. Thirteen of the 27 EU countries have a requirement of five years or fewer for citizenship. I think only six require eight years, for example. That does not matter, to my mind. When we look at the requirements in different countries, there are all kinds of more complicated criteria involved. For example, if a person has a family history of connection to a country, it might reduce the period of time. If a person has a good knowledge of the language of a country, it might reduce the period of time. I do not see the benefit for Ireland to increasing the period for naturalisation from five to eight years. I also do not think that anybody comes to this country on the basis of how long it takes before they apply for citizenship by naturalisation. I do not know how much difference it will make either way.

I agree with the provisions for a citizenship test. I called for this in the Seanad in May 2024. It is entirely reasonable that people should acquaint themselves with the history and culture of the country. The language also plays an important part. I made reference to other countries in Europe, Hungary and Spain for example, where having a knowledge of the language speeds a person up on the track to citizenship. More often than not, when we talk about language and people coming here we are referring to the English language. However, if a person came here and developed an interest and expertise in Irish, that should put them in a different position when applying for citizenship. I pay tribute to the Minister of State, because he has taken on an invidious task in being the person responsible for migration and he has transformed the way we approach many aspects of migration in a positive way. I disagree with him on this particular policy. We have, however, made huge progress, and that huge progress should be recognised when possible.

Deputy Martin Kenny: Ireland has changed hugely in the past 40 years or more. As a country, we were a net exporter of labour until 40 years ago. Things have changed. Very large families were the norm and people died younger. We also had an economy which struggled. Now, much of that has changed and as society becomes more affluent, families get smaller and people live longer. Those two things mean that we are going to need an awful lot of labour to come from somewhere else, and that is similar across every country in Europe. We particularly need skilled labour for the manufacturing sector and other sectors in Ireland and it has to come here from elsewhere. That is a reality we have to get used to.

The problem we see in my office more than anything else is employers who have people here working when they try to get their visas renewed.

The whole system has changed. Whereas this issue was dealt with by a local garda in the local Garda station, which dealt with the immigration office, it has now moved to a portal. It might as well be in Mars because nobody can get through to anyone or talk to anybody. They send in their information, wait for months and then hear their information has been lost and they should resubmit their application. There have been cases in my constituency where Americans, Canadians and Australians - I am dealing with two Australian people who are working here - cannot get their visa renewed because the system is broken. The Minister of State is talking about making changes. If he gets the blinking thing that is there now right, we might have a chance of working it. I have spoken to senior people in the Department of justice to try to resolve this and they keep telling me they are putting more resources into it and doing this, that and the other to help. It is not working. That is the reality. The system needs to be got right and I ask the Minister of State to get it right.

As regards the other changes, particularly with regard to citizenship, no one is coming to me saying there is a big problem with citizenship. The problem is trying to apply for it and the difficulties applicants are having with doing so.

The entire debate on migration in this country and most other countries is being poisoned by fascism. All kinds of lies and nonsense are being spread the length and breadth of the country. It is feeding people's egos to make them believe that we Irish are better than everyone else. That is part of the problem we have here and I want the Minister of State to recognise that. Many of the people who are spreading these lies are connected to international fascists, parties such as Alternative for Germany and the National Front in Britain. These are the people who are poisoning the atmosphere and we need to spell that out and recognise it.

I am not saying changes do not need to be made - they absolutely do - but whatever changes are to be made, the first one has to be to get a system that actually works for people who are here and want to stay and contribute to society. They need to have a human being to talk to at the end of the phone because nobody can get one now. My office is inundated with people who cannot get their visa sorted out. The Minister of State needs to make the effort to change the system for the right reasons.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Let us be honest about what is happening here with the new proposed citizenship Bill. This is the latest episode of Jim O'Callaghan trying to clamber his way to the top of Fianna Fáil on the backs of vulnerable people. In this case, it is the people who make our health services work, who are part of our communities and who contribute to our society. Jim O'Callaghan is making himself out to be the hard man on immigration so that he can become leader of Fianna Fáil. It is a solution to a problem that simply does not exist and one that will make real problems worse for people. It will make the health crisis worse and potentially make the housing crisis worse. It certainly will not address the cost-of-living crisis. It is another one of these episodes of performative cruelty that will not make life better for anybody in this country. Instead, it will just make life harder for people who are working and living here, doing essential work, paying taxes and contributing to our society. It is a policy that the far right could have written. It is pandering to racism, the far right and fascism and Government members should be absolutely ashamed of themselves for it.

Many of the arguments put out there are simply falsehoods through and through. It is not true that this would bring us into line with other EU countries. No other EU country has all three of the bars to citizenship in this proposed Bill, namely, the salary bar, the benefits bar and the debt bar. Twenty-one of 27 EU countries do not have any salary bar for citizenship, recognising that many migrants do low-paid but essential work such as caring for older people, children and people with disabilities. Extending the residency requirement to eight years before people can even apply for citizenship is out of line with other countries. France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Malta and the Netherlands allow people to apply after five years. In Canada, Australia and the US, where thousands of Irish people go every year, people can apply after three to five years. This highlights the hypocrisy. It is why it is correct to say that what is proposed is racist. The Government is happy to see people emigrate and happy to see the back of as many young people as possible, but when it comes to people coming here a different standard is applied. That is racism and xenophobia, pure and simple. It is also not what people want. If we look at opinion polls, nobody is asking for this. People want to see integration and support for people.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Citizenship is not merely a legal status; it is a statement of belonging. It is how people who have built their lives here, work here, raise their families here and contribute to our society become full and equal members of that society. Each country has the right to determine the rules around how it grants citizenship to others - no one disputes that. However, the proposals being advanced by the Government, specifically the increase in the time period from five to eight years, moves us in the wrong direction. These changes will make the pathway to citizenship longer, more complicated and more uncertain for people who are already living legally in Ireland and making a valuable contribution in our country.

Last week, some of the people who will be impacted by these changes protested outside Leinster House. I was struck by what they chanted, "We work, we pay tax". Their frustration was tangible. These changes are impacting people who have played by the rules and who undertake crucial work. Some are in high-end jobs, some are in university research, while others are in core, caring roles that are essential to our health and social services. What is most striking is that the Government has failed to explain what problems these measures are actually intended to solve. At a time when anti-immigrant rhetoric is becoming louder across Europe, including here in Ireland, there is a real risk that these proposals are more about political signalling than they are about good public policy. To me it seems the Government is being performatively tough on migration of any kind to match what it perceives to be a shift in sentiment. That is the opposite of the leadership we need right now.

I am particularly concerned about people who already have applications in process. Those who have submitted applications did so based on the rules that existed at the time. Existing applications should be submitted under the current system and the new requirements should not be applied retrospectively.

I raise again the delay in issuing visas to students from Gaza who have been accepted to study in Irish institutions. Sixty students are facing unacceptable delays and unfair procedural requirements, particularly considering that they live in a war zone. The Department of justice needs to rapidly process these visas.

Deputy Seamus Healy: The proposals to impose more severe regulations governing Irish citizenship are pandering to a tiny minority of far-right, anti-immigrant voices. It is shameful. As the Irish Council for Civil Liberties has said, no rationale, research or evidence has been presented by the Department for these proposed changes and no issues have been identified in the current system.

Claims that changes bring us into line with Europe do not ring true as several European countries retain the five-year rule, including France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and many others. At a minimum, any new rules must not apply to those who are already in this country. These workers were actively recruited by State agencies to address critical staff shortages. The HSE, for example, targeted recruitment across the globe to fill medical, nursing, paramedical and healthcare assistant posts. Many were specifically recruited for IT and engineering sectors under Ireland's critical skills programme. These workers keep our hospitals, nursing homes, hospitality and agricultural sectors afloat. These workers are here legally on work visas and employment permits and under Ireland's critical skills programme. They work and pay their taxes, they are law-abiding and they have brought their families here with them. They are embedded in local communities, on parents' councils in the schools their

children attend, and they are members of our sports clubs, with many playing our national games. These families have made a permanent commitment to this country and it would be deeply unfair to move the goalposts for these individuals now. It must not happen. The five-year rule must stay for anyone who is currently in this country.

I commend Clonmel Together, an organisation that does tremendous work in the area of welcoming and integrating new communities.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: We have heard a lot about this Bill but we have not seen it. We have heard what has been planned. We need to say that it is unnecessary, divisive and damaging. There has never been any demand in this Dáil or anywhere else for a discussion about citizenship. In fact, all I have heard about is IPAS centres and "illegals".

4 o'clock

Suddenly, we have a problem with citizenship. The Government is failing on housing and the cost of living and suddenly, this is brought into the equation as the Dáil starts its term. It is taking the focus of the data centres eating our electricity or the fact that seven out of ten young people feel they are going to have to leave this country. It is performative cruelty.

Naturalisation should not have to be a massive burden. If people have been living and working in this country for five years and want to settle down here, they should have security and they deserve that, especially non-EU citizens who have to go through visas and difficulties every single time they need to go home if a family member is sick. This is racist and it follows the far-right approach taken elsewhere. As others have said, it is not in line with other countries.

I want to mention the income test as well. A rake of parties and Independents went to briefings about how terribly migrant healthcare assistants were being treated in this country. If those Members dare stand up and support this Bill when it does come through, they are hypocrites because these people are doing essential work in our nursing homes and so many aspects of our lives.

The language test is a similar matter. I do not speak Irish. Are we going to make migrants perform to a higher level than is the case for other people? This is not needed and all the Government is doing here is making life miserable and creating guest workers in this country rather than people who have a stake in society.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on this debate. There are three essential points I want to make. First, as others have said, we have not yet seen the bones of this legislation but we are hearing what is coming down the line in respect of citizenship criteria. I am generally supportive of it. I think we need to have bookended policy that defines what citizenship is. That is quite standard for most countries. However, accommodation needs to be made for people who have been here long term or people who are married or in long-term relationships here and who are already queuing in the system. There needs to be some honouring of that. They have already bought into the system and applied. They are in a long queue to have their citizenship and naturalisation determined. Some accommodation needs to be made for that.

It has been said there will have to be a proficiency in speaking the English language. There are not many migrants who have become fluent in Irish since they came here but there is a minority of examples. One is Misha Yerhidzé - I have probably made a disaster of pronouncing his name - who was in the Public Gallery 12 months ago. He came down and met people of all parties and none. He is a young boy who is living in Ballyferriter and he has a fabulous blas for the Irish language. He plays the concertina. Irish is our State language and it needs to be in those criteria. It cannot just be proficiency in English. The Irish community demands that that be inserted as a criterion.

Communities like Lisdoonvarna in County Clare bent over backwards when the war in Ukraine began. Their population increased fourfold. I have heard people stand up and speak about what their communities have done. There are none in the country that has taken on as much as Lisdoonvarna and it did so proudly. However, I made the point this morning at the Oireachtas education committee that the local school there went from 70-something pupils to 140-something pupils within the space of a month. This was a massive change for it. The point I made at the committee is that just as this ramped up very quickly, at some stage, please God, there will be peace in Ukraine and their status as beneficiaries of temporary protection will expire. At that point, the Department and the Government need to show the same flexibility to schools and communities like that as they wind back from this escalated scenario, as the communities themselves showed that flexibility in the first instance.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I thank the Minister of State for the opportunity to discuss migration and, of course, the Bill that is being proposed. In the first instance, I acknowledge his opening remarks and the value that he put on migration, which is a hallmark of his tenure as Minister of State in this Department. It is so important that people in power use every opportunity they get to talk up the value of migration.

In fairness to the universal theme that has been evident in this Chamber, so far at least - and I have listened to the entire debate - every person who has stood up has spoken about the value and importance of migration, in all parties and none. That is a measure of the strength of integration in this country. I do not think that should be divorced from our ability or capacity to make changes to our system in a firm way. We have made very significant changes to our international protection system. That has worked and, quite frankly, has proved to be fair. There is a recognition of the changes that have been made and that has not done any damage to the issues of integration.

Similarly, I have no objection to the issue of citizenship being examined or to changes being made 20 years after the last iteration, but as it relates to people who are playing by the rules - I am talking about people here on stamp 4 visas, many of them constituents of everybody in this Chamber - they want to play by the rules and they have played by the rules. As the Taoiseach indicated, at least in interviews with the media earlier, it needs to be examined in the context of the Bill that people who came here and have been granted visas knowing what the rules would be on their pathway to citizenship should be exempt from any final iteration of this Bill and should be covered by the existing regime. That would be proportionate and fair. These people recognise that you can change the rules. They are working hard and trying to get ahead. They recognise that countries can change rules, but they have played by the rules and support work.

It is ironic that within this Chamber, for the first time in a very long time, we have heard discussion about full employment and the economy from the Opposition, which never talks about those things. One of the big challenges we have in this country is that we do have full employment and we want to ensure we have the right skills here. I urge the Minister of State and the senior Minister in the Department to examine this issue of being proportionate and fair to people who have played by the rules. They should be covered by the existing regime and not by any new regime that will be introduced.

Deputy Martin Daly: I thank the Minister of State for the opportunity to speak here today. I am the son of an immigrant. My mother was Indian. She came here in 1954 to study medicine in the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. She loved this country. She did not hold citizenship for almost 40 years after having seven children and working in a rural practice. She took out an Irish passport in her later years because it facilitated travel to and from Europe. The point I am making is that you can have residency here, and we should not conflate that and scare people who are long-term residents here and have not applied for citizenship heretofore. While we look at reform of our citizenship requirements, we should make that clear to people.

It is important that we have a review of the citizenship requirements. I am quite happy with the idea that there are certain civic requirements such as language tests, a history of contribution to the economy and other such tests. I do not have a problem with that. The extension of five to eight years can be debated but I have had no representations of real fear around that. Where there is concern is the fact the application for citizenship takes so long at the moment. I have been dealing with a medical consultant and his wife, who is a nurse. They have been here for a number of years. They have two children in India being brought up by frail, elderly grandparents and they are finding it very difficult to effect family unification. I We need to have more flexibility around individual cases where people have demonstrated their commitment to this country.

Let us not forget that migration to this country has been a good thing, in spite of the efforts by organised right-wing groups to conflate illegal and legal immigration. The vast majority of migration here involves people we have invited into this country and who have added to our economy in all sorts of spheres, such as healthcare, the hospitality industry, construction, pharmaceuticals and information technology, IT. They have added to this economy, and they need to feel that their work and their presence here are valued.

Unfortunately, we have had a rise in racism. Fourteen or 15 months ago, we had a spate of attacks against Indian nationals around this country. I visited the then Indian ambassador, Mr. Akhilesh Mishra, and expressed my sadness at those attacks where people were being targeted because of the colour of their skin. It was driven by social media and people like Elon Musk and his hundreds of millions of followers.

There is a crucial point about people whose application for citizenship is already in the system, such as that couple I referred to who have been in the system for two years. Another doctor who has approached me has been here for 15 years. His wife is a teacher and now works as a special needs assistant, SNA. She has applied for citizenship. She has been in the system for two years and they are fearful that they will be set back.

We really need flexibility and fairness for the group of people who already have their application in process. It is important that while the Government has pursued a focus on

immigration, part of the reasoning for that has been, in my estimation, that we must have a fair, firm system the public believes in. There is a narrative against our immigration system that suggests we have an open-door policy and that creates problems, so we have to have a system the public has full confidence in to avoid creating political vacuums where fascists and right-wing agitators can prosper. I agree with the tightening of our immigration rules on that basis. We have to demonstrate to the public that the system is fair and equitable.

On the issue of migrants generally, the State is not recognising adequately their contribution to the State and to our economy and we must have a much more forceful narrative coming from the State, Government and public representatives on the value of migration to our country. Our birth rate is falling. Our elderly demographic is growing larger. There will be one million people over 65 by 2030 and 1.6 million by 2045. We need migration to keep this country and this economy stable.

Deputy Mark Ward: Irish citizenship is something to be valued. It represents membership of our nation, carries rights and responsibilities and should reflect a genuine and lasting commitment to Ireland. When I first heard the Government was looking to change citizenship rules I thought it was just a smokescreen to hide its failures on migration in general, and nothing I have heard since has led me to change my mind. The Government is just looking to go after low-hanging fruit. It is going after people who have migrated to our island, who have already contributed positively to our country, who work hard, who are part of our communities and who want to become citizens. All the Government has done is create uncertainty for these people, and to me this is wrong. I recognise any changes to citizenship rules can create uncertainty for those seeking to acquire Irish citizenship, and this needs to be considered.

For too long successive governments of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have failed to develop a coherent citizenship policy. The current system relies heavily on length of residence and rules that are often unclear to applicants. Time spent in Ireland does and should matter but it should not be the only determining factor. Those seeking citizenship must demonstrate integration, contribution, good character and a commitment to Irish society. If you believe in a rules-based system for migration, those rules must be enforced, not next week, next year or in five years' time. Those rules must be enforced quickly and efficiently. If you are someone who enters our country seeking refuge and you have a right to be here, you should be afforded every single opportunity by the State to make a positive contribution to our society. If you have not got the right to be here, as outlined in the rules, then you should be returned to your country of origin as quickly and as safely as possible. Most decent people on this island would agree with that. People I talk to when I am canvassing day to day and speaking to them face to face would agree that is a fair system.

On international protection, I have raised before many times, especially in relation to Saggart, IPAS centres should not be located in communities that already lack services and facilities and which are already experiencing deprivation. There needs to be a process of engagement with communities. In previous debates we put forward amendments that would ensure communities are consulted and that there is a conversation about new IPAS centres going into their areas and that their genuine concerns are listened to, but the Government and other parties voted against this. When communities are not listened to it creates a vacuum for bad actors to fill, often with false information. This can lead to division and unrest in our communities and this is the last thing we need.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: I will make it very simple, as I always have, and say that if people of any nationality are migrating to this country are here to work, support their families, integrate, support society and respect Ireland - as we do - then we will respect them and they are welcome. If people are here for the wrong reasons, they should turn on their heels and get out. It is as simple as that.

People in Ireland are the most welcoming in the world. They integrate and they work with everyone and all different nationalities. They respect everyone's religion and everyone respects ours. That is what I support. However, there have been people who are here for years who have done exactly what I said in that they have worked hard here, applied for citizenship, integrated and supported their families and communities. The rules on that should be based on the rules on the day they came here, and if new rules are being implemented, they should not be part of that. They should be recognised from the time they applied. It is the same as any rule that changes in that it should change from here on out. It is true we need to tighten up our citizenship and that we have an open-door policy that we need to tighten up, but the good people who came here for the right reasons should be accommodated here. As for the ones who came here for the wrong reasons, we need everyone's help to get rid of them.

Deputy Michael Collins: The Cathaoirleach Gníomhach might indulge me as I would like to pass on my condolences to Treasa, Cillian and Aisling and their family on the loss of Seamus Carroll. Seamus was a lovely usher here in the Dáil. He was friendly, charming and full of fun and was always so very helpful to us all, especially me and my office staff. We will miss him here in Dáil Éireann. May he rest in peace.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Collins: Ireland has always been a welcoming country and raising legitimate concerns about immigration does not make somebody anti-immigrant. Independent Ireland supports legal immigration and we recognise the enormous contribution people who come here legally make to our economy, our health services and our communities. However, we also have to be honest about capacity. We have a housing crisis, enormous pressure on our health services and communities being asked to accommodate significant change without proper consultation. We need faster decisions and proper enforcement when applications are unsuccessful as well as effective border controls and genuine engagement with communities.

At the same time, a firm immigration system must also be a fair one. I recently made representations on behalf of a South African national living in Ballydehob who is facing deportation. He has specialist skills in solar PV, inverter and battery storage technology. He works with a west Cork company and is passing those skills on to Irish electricians. His employer wants to retain him and is prepared to regularise his employment. Surely circumstances like these deserve proportionate consideration.

I also welcome the Taoiseach's indication that the proposed new criteria may not apply retrospectively to people already resident here. That protection should be written clearly into the Bill. People who came here, planned their lives around the five-year rule, and are working here, especially those nearing eligibility, deserve certainty and fairness. We should also examine the situation of PhD researchers, many of whom teach, publish, pay tax and contribute

enormously to Ireland, yet time spent here on a student permission does not count as reckonable residence. At least part of full-time doctoral research should be recognised towards residence. I sent the Minister of State's office a case on Monday concerning a young man who was born and raised in Ireland and lived here for approximately 20 years, but because he was apparently born just days after a change in the law, he is now struggling to obtain citizenship. Will the Minister of State personally examine that case? It should be straightforward but once again it is not. We need an immigration system that is controlled and accountable but also fair, proportionate and capable of applying common sense to individual circumstances.

Deputy Paul Lawless: This summer a man was convicted of the murder of three young children in Parnell Square. He lived in Ireland for 20 years. He needed an interpreter because he could not speak the language in court and he never worked a day in his life. Despite this, that person had Irish citizenship. How does that happen? Irish citizenship should be valued. It should be something to be worked for and something to be earned. Generations of Irish men and women have fought and bled for this nation, and this Government has thrown out citizenship far too easily. I asked the Minister for Social Protection how many people are on social welfare benefits who are new arrivals to the country and have a similar history of not working in this State.

The Minister was unable to tell me because he does not count the figures. How do we make a policy on this if we are not even going to collect the data?

Countries like Denmark and Germany have a language test, a civics test and financial requirements as well. Many years ago, we raised this and called for citizenship reform. Indeed many Irish citizens right across the country did so as well and anyone who raised this topic was shouted down and called many names under the sun. What an immature democracy. What a poor reflection on this Parliament and this Dáil that so many politicians who actually stood up today and welcomed the proposal were the same politicians from the same parties who shouted down Aontú and called us many names. I welcome the fact the Government is moving in the right direction. It is only right and proper that we would treat citizenship with value and introduce a language test, a civics test and, crucially, requirements around social welfare and financial independence. These things are normal and right and it is absurd the Government is only waking up to it now.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: It is good to have the opportunity to talk about this. I know Senators did a couple of days ago. When the legislation comes forward, I hope we have ample debating time. I told the Tánaiste that we need a citizens' convention on citizenship, immigration and asylum issues. We need to have a proper debate, get rid of the myths and the conspiracy theories and look at facts and figures. Sometimes the facts and figures will suit those perceived to be right wing and sometimes they will suit those perceived to be left wing but to be clear, morally, anyone who has made a contribution to this country should have a pathway to citizenship. It does not mean it should be an easy pathway because Irish citizenship is a privilege and not a right but so many people have contacted me who have been here and applied for citizenship on the basis of five years and now they fear it is going to go to eight years. For anyone who has applied, it would be totally unfair for that to change during his or her application.

I think five years is enough if the application process is tough enough in the first place. That means stringent language requirements not just in one language, such as Irish or English, but the ability to demonstrate some proficiency in the other language along with a knowledge of cultural norms, how the electoral system operates in this country, how the various State agencies operate and what is expected in terms of being a law-abiding citizen. In that context, there are many here who are already making a good contribution to our country who should be rewarded through that pathway.

Then we have people who are fleeing persecution. We know that at least 30% of those who go through the system are found on appeal to be genuinely fleeing war and persecution. They need to be protected and they also need a pathway but, equally, they have to follow the same cultural norms and have to have the same learning requirements to become citizens rather than protected residents. There are others in this country who have committed crimes, have been told they have to leave and have not left. That has to stop. That is what a balanced process is.

Deputy Catherine Callaghan: We need to be able to speak about migration and citizenship calmly, openly and honestly because if we do not talk about these issues in this House, people will talk about them elsewhere and very often without the facts. I represent Carlow-Kilkenny and I listen to people on the ground. People talk to me about migration and about the pressure on housing, schools, GP services and other public services and those concerns should be heard. People should be able to raise reasonable questions about migration without being labelled or dismissed but equally we have a responsibility to deal in facts. There is a perception among some people that the number of non-Irish people living in Ireland is far greater than it actually is. The most recent census showed that around 12% of the population were non-Irish citizens. We should acknowledge the contribution people who have come to Ireland make every day in our hospitals, nursing homes, construction, agriculture, hospitality, business and communities right across the country so this cannot be a debate of one extreme or the other.

Ireland is entitled to manage migration. We should have a system where the rules are clear, where decisions are made efficiently and where those decisions are then followed through. People seeking international protection deserve a fair decision and they deserve it quickly and where someone is found not to have a right to remain, that decision also has to mean something.

However, there is another side to this discussion and that is citizenship. I acknowledge that there is a real concern among many newcomers to Ireland about the proposed changes to our citizenship rules and what those changes mean for them and their families. Some people have come here, worked, paid their taxes, raised children and built their lives around an understanding of the pathway to citizenship that existed when they arrived. They now need clarity and certainty. They need to know where they stand. Of course, it is entirely reasonable that we have a serious discussion about the rules governing Irish citizenship because Irish citizenship is significant. It brings rights and responsibility. Becoming an Irish citizen should mean something. It is also about belonging. At citizenship ceremonies across the country, we see people who have chosen Ireland as their home. They have built lives here, become our neighbours and our colleagues and are raising the next generation here. That is something we should value so as we consider any proposed changes, we need to get this balance right - protecting the integrity and value of Irish citizenship while also being fair to people who have come here legally, who have contributed to this country and who genuinely want to make Ireland their permanent home.

Deputy Edward Timmins: It is so important that in all discussions here, we choose our language carefully. We must not say anything that might inflame situations or give encouragement to any extreme positions. We must stick at all times to the facts because we remember that we are talking about fellow human beings. The most important thing is that we have open and frank discussions. This will lessen the possibility of false information and extreme positions taking hold.

Three years ago, I stated publicly that we should have an open discussion on immigration. To date, we have failed to have open discussions. We have nothing to hide. What are we afraid of? Do we not trust the Irish people with open discussions and all the facts? In Ireland, over 23% of the population were born outside the country. The US and the UK, which are countries we consider melting pots, have never had this level of foreign-born residents. Their highest figures were 17% to 18%. Why are we not discussing this? What implications does it have for social cohesion, education and other issues in society? The rapid rise in numbers over the past decade has implications for housing. It means we are playing catch up in every part of the economy and our public services.

A common thread in most of the issues we discussed here in the Dáil and at committee is that as a State, we are poor at long-term planning. We need to be doing detailed planning and budgeting ten, 20 and 30 years ahead. Do we need to review our work permit situation or how we can encourage Irish-trained people, for example, nurses to remain? By not discussing these matters, we are leaving it open to the extremes on both sides to dictate the narrative. Many of the people I meet and those who call into my clinics regularly raise these issues with me. These are ordinary, decent, generous, community people.

I commend the Minister of State on the steps he has taken to deal with international protection. The European migration pact was a significant move that will contribute to regularising migration and lead to quicker decisions. I have always said that we need to align our country with all other EU states as the only way to manage migration. In relation to cost, I expect to see large reductions in the cost of IPAS centres as we go forward. The new citizenship rules regarding residency again align us with other member states. One of the cornerstones of any system is that all citizens of the State are treated equally. In the case of IPAS residents who are working and earning a wage, there must be a contribution to all accommodation costs. Can we also have an open discussion regarding housing? Do people exiting IPAS centres obtain social housing locally quickly, do those centres then take in new IPAS residents and does this lead to some small communities having very large IPAS populations? In my own county of Wicklow, the majority of IPAS centres are located in one municipal district - west Wicklow.

This district is also the most poorly served by public transport and services.

I will repeat what I said at the beginning. I hope this forms part of a move to a more open and frank discussion.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I welcome the proposals brought forward by the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, and Minister of State, Deputy Brophy. I encourage the Opposition to consider them at face value rather than ascribing a motivation to them. I believe they are in many ways common-sense proposals. Citizenship is among the most important rights a state can confer

on an individual. It is not just a paper document. It is a reflection of a connection to Ireland and a commitment by the citizen to actively participate in the life of our nation, in our communities and in our democracy. Citizenship offers an individual the opportunity to actively participate together with others who call this island home and those around the world who are summoned to our flag.

In my community, I see those families. I see those who came here to work, study and build a life. They are involved in our sports clubs, staff our hospitals and run our local businesses. They are our neighbours and friends. It is a proud day for both them and Ireland when they cross that threshold and become citizens of a republic. You can see it on their faces in the photographs and the video footage. It is because that moment matters so much that we should protect it.

The proposals in the Irish nationality and citizenship (amendment) Bill 2026 include increasing the qualifying period of reckonable residence from five to eight years and introducing language testing in English, Irish and, importantly, Irish Sign Language, alongside a test on Irish civics, society and politics. Importantly, none of this is unusual. Austria, Italy, Spain and Switzerland all set residency periods in a similar way. Most EU countries require language proficiency. Civics tests are common across the Union. Economic self-sufficiency is a standard pillar of citizenship policy from Germany to Denmark to Poland. These changes bring Ireland into line with our European partners.

Of course, we retain sovereignty in this area, but this comparison with other EU countries is important because in granting Irish citizenship, we are effectively granting EU citizenship and granting people access to the four freedoms that we cherish so dearly in the European Union. The Bill will also give the Minister a distinct power to revoke citizenship on public order and national security grounds, with a streamlined process to do so, surely a reasonable safeguard for any state.

The Bill will now go to the Oireachtas joint committee on justice for pre-legislative scrutiny. I look forward to a detailed debate there because there are questions with regard to addressing the transitional arrangements. However, in the same way that these are common-sense proposals, I expect that those transition arrangements will also be dealt with in a common-sense way. I commend the Bill to the House.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: I welcome the opportunity to speak on these statements on migration and citizenship. Sinn Féin's position is clear. We want a strong, fair and efficient migration system that supports the ambition and interests of the people of this State, while reflecting the inherent decency of the Irish people and upholding our obligations to those fleeing war and persecution. Managing migration requires concerted action and long-term planning. For a start, migration should be managed on an all-island basis. That makes absolute sense. With work permits and student visas, we should take into account our capacity to house and integrate people, as well as the availability of public services. That is an argument for basic planning, something that was clearly missing in recent years.

I am looking at the most recent push notification in the news on my phone and the headline is: "Substantial sums paid to asylum seeker accommodation providers represented 'no value'". That is the news today from the Comptroller and Auditor General. It will not come as a surprise to people. We need to do better. Our international protection system must be fair, efficient and

enforced. People need to have confidence in it. Sinn Féin calls for faster processing, an end to profiteering, as just mentioned, enforcement of deportations and genuine support for integration. Each of those elements is important.

Sinn Féin opposed the majority of the EU asylum and migration pact and the International Protection Bill 2026 due to sovereignty concerns and the fact the pact did not adequately account for Ireland's unique status as an EU state sharing a common travel area with a non-EU state. We need better data collection on entry and exit and the urgent pursuit of a legally binding, bilateral agreement with Britain.

Irish citizenship is deeply valuable. It represents membership of our nation, carries rights and responsibilities and reflects a genuine commitment to Ireland. We recognise the immense contribution that migrants make across our public services, economy and communities in every single corner of Ireland. Citizenship should never be reduced to a passport acquired simply through the passage of time or a privilege reserved only for the wealthy or well-connected. Successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael governments have failed to build a coherent policy, relying instead on broad discretion and unclear rules. Measuring time spent in Ireland, for example, in and of itself does not necessarily demonstrate integration. Sinn Féin supports a structured, transparent pathway to citizenship, with clear rules focusing on civic participation, community involvement, tax compliance and language proficiency.

Elsewhere, the Government must urgently address residence permit renewal delays. It must provide access to secure long-term residence options, create a pathway for people in the North who have legally moved here, and examine fair transitional arrangements.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I welcome the debate. It is great that we can debate this in a reasonable and calm manner. I was in the Chair for a lot of it and I have listened to all of the debate. It is three years ago that we should have had this debate, but we could not raise it here in the House. Any of us who raised serious issues were decried and bemoaned as far right and God knows what else.

I welcome the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, and the Minister of State, Deputy Brophy, to this job. They have made an effort to deal with elected politicians. What happened under the previous Government, Deputy Roderic O'Gorman and his Department, and what happened with the senior officials in justice and integration, was nothing short of scandalous, given the way they treated the people and communities of Tipperary and beyond. What they did in Roscrea, Dundrum and many other places showed the deceit and contempt they had for the ordinary people. The people of Dundrum and Roscrea came out and stood solidly, calmly and honestly. They did not want any far-right people. They hunted bad actors because of their contempt for the communities. The demographic is not supposed to be changed by more than 5%, but it was changed by 200% in Dundrum, with a good community destroyed. They sat at the gates. They were peaceful and good-humoured, and they did it for as long as they could, but no, the Government would not talk to them. Now it has taken the decision to close Dundrum House Hotel. What happened in this situation is that there were greedy actors that had no interest in anyone else, Irish, English or from Timbuktu, but an interest in fat, deep pockets. This allowed people to get rich. Filthy people, I call them, who were exploiting these people coming in, with bad conditions, getting millions in contracts from the State - taxpayers' money - and getting

away with it. Now we have created a mess. Thank God, Dundrum is sorted, but many other areas are not.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: My uncles and aunts had to go to America to work. There was nothing here for them in the late fifties and sixties, and they gave all their lives there. I appreciate people who come here to work and are working in healthcare, hospitality and the construction industries. The country needs workers with proper visas.

The main issue that I am hearing every day in my office, and again today, is from people who want to work here but who are having difficulties renewing or getting work permits or visas. There used to be an immigration officer whom a person could meet to discuss a visa or permit application, but that has all gone online and it is nearly impossible to get an update. There is a slowing down of everything for those who want to stay here to work. The Government needs to address that issue and not confuse it with anything else.

I am constantly being contacted by employers in the construction and hospitality industries who are trying to retain staff and have issues with their work visas. The system needs to be simplified. We should not be making people jump through hoops to get their work visas.

A lot of people were brought to Killarney and packed into asylum centres against the wishes of local people. It hurt local people very badly.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Time is up, Deputy.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: My companion speaker has not arrived so I am using her time, as would be normal.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I was not made aware of that.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am sorry.

The Government would not listen at that time. It hurt and angered so many people and brought their wrath down because the Government was not listening to them. I was told I was a lone dog whistling when I mentioned there were more than 70 male asylum seekers put into a house on the Muckcross Road. I was called every kind of name and it was like as if I was the red devil altogether when I mentioned such a thing. There was no thought given and no discussion with anyone. We need to get away from that. I thank the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, for some of the measures he is bringing forward.

I go back to the fact that there are people who want to work and we need to ensure they are allowed in here to work and are given work permits.

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

Deputy Carol Nolan: Can I speak for a second?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: For one second, as Deputy Nolan's time has gone now.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Stand up and say something anyway.

Deputy Carol Nolan: Thanks, and I apologise.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: With the permission of the House.

Deputy Carol Nolan: Is that okay?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Agreed.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will give Deputy Nolan a minute.

Deputy Carol Nolan: I will be as brief as I can. A very small minority of us in this House have been saying for years now that the levels of inward migration and explosion in the number of people being granted citizenship would lead to major challenges for the State and for Irish society. We have been thoroughly vindicated in those concerns. That is why I welcome moves to introduce a more rigorous set of requirements but to my mind, they do not go far enough. I accept this will have an impact on a very small number of people but the time when the State can simply coast along handing out citizenship and immigration permissions like confetti is well past. I will end on that note.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Colm Brophy): While I do not agree with what the Deputy said, *per se*, I do admire that she got here. I heard the breathlessness in her voice and it is important she got to make her contribution.

I will begin my reply by saying that we had a debate today that covered migration and citizenship. The difficulty in doing that in one joint debate is that I felt there was quite a lot of conflating of various issues which, unfortunately, did not give any real clarity to people who would listen to this debate.

I will not use my prepared remarks but will take a few minutes to reply to what Deputies said. I will start by re-emphasising that I believe the commitment of the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, and I has always been to look at reform around the area of how we handle migration in our country - inward migration, emigration and the whole process of migration - and ensuring we have a system that is fit for purpose. That is a system, particularly in the migration area, which is firm, fair and effective, a system that is rules based, a system that makes sure the public can have confidence in it and that people going through it can be dealt with in a fair manner. Through the implementation of the migration pact and the transposing of that into Irish law we have actually done that.

I noted some of Sinn Féin's contributions today, which were pretty much the usual tropes thrown out and did not even acknowledge the fact that the migration pact has brought some of the singularly biggest changes. We have seen a drastic reduction in numbers, which was not acknowledged. We have seen times change from years to months to weeks. We have seen a process that is now working and is deemed by people going through it to enable them to have a very fair and effective system, and is one that is actually delivering for the State.

It is really important that in looking at the argument, be it migration or be it citizenship, that we try to have a discussion. To be honest, I frankly find it insulting that when certain Deputies stand up, their contribution could be distilled down to, "Let me see how many times I can say performative cruelty", and they think that is a thought-out contribution. I do not feel that what anybody is doing in this House is trying to introduce a system that is based on performative cruelty. You may disagree with individual aspects of how the system works but throwing out insults, whether it is at the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, at the Government or at me, does not contribute to the debate. What is important to recognise is that there are real changes we can look at to ensure the system works, be it in migration or citizenship.

I want to clearly move to citizenship as part of this discussion. What we are trying to do is propose a series or package of measures that would change how we look at how someone acquires citizenship. We have been clear from the start that it is a package of measures. We believe that package reflects a modern society. It reflects a lot of European norms. It reflects how people feel about the importance and the privilege that attaining Irish citizenship is. I look forward to the fact, and have done from day one, that package of measures will be looked at, analysed, gone through and debated during the pre-legislative scrutiny process and by the process of legislation going through the Oireachtas. The Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, and I have always made it quite clear we want that process because we want to have an effective package at the end of it that not only enables people, which I am absolutely committed to, to achieve Irish citizenship because they have come here and made their lives here, but also ensures that citizenship is a very genuine, deep citizenship that somebody has an opportunity to feel they have achieved through a whole range of experiences. That includes their life experience, their work experience, their knowledge of our country, their proficiency in our language and their ability to contribute. It is never just any simple matrix such as "How many years have I been here? I must have citizenship".

I am someone who has presided over citizenship ceremonies as a Minister of State. As someone who has such a deep belief in Irish citizenship, I am afraid I do not subscribe to the notion that just because you come here, and we want you to come here and work and make a life here if that is what you want to do in whatever area, whether contributing to our public services or working at the heart of our tech, that is somehow or other selling an Irish citizenship or passport. It is not. It is the first stage of a process of someone coming to make his or her life in Ireland and as a result of that, having an opportunity, as that evolves, to have the privilege of citizenship, which is very important.

The debate is important. It is important we try to listen to each other. It is important we try to take out the language that is just designed to vilify or knock someone whose viewpoint you do not agree with. I heard people whose political party I agree with virtually nothing on what it stands for, say things I totally agreed with. I heard people who I would be much closer to in a political party context say things I did not agree with. That is the thing about this debate. You must be willing to take the debate in the round and believe contributions can be made by everybody to this debate that will contribute to us having the thing we want. The thing I would like and believe we should all want at the end of this is a system of migration that works for people coming in, be it coming in to claim international protection or, crucially, coming in to contribute in so many ways to work for our country. We also want a system that works when it comes to citizenship and ensures that when somebody gets the privilege of Irish citizenship that it is a deep privilege, which we - them and the State - have collectively worked together to

ensure the benefits they derive from that citizenship are the maximum for them and for the State. That is what we are hoping to achieve in the legislation we are bringing forward.

Industrial Development (Amendment) and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2026: Report Stage

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 1 to 5, inclusive, are related and may be discussed together.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Do I need to move all of the amendments?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No, just amendment No.1. The Deputy should not rush it.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I move amendment No.1:

In page 5, between lines 32 and 33, to insert the following:

“(3) A consultancy grant shall not be made for the engagement of consultants to provide advice or studies in respect of any activity of military relevance.”

There are a series of amendments from myself and Deputy Gibney in this area. On the Second Stage debate, the Minister said that this Bill has no implications for our neutrality, but it has serious implications for our neutrality. My understanding of our neutrality is that we do not support or promote the arms industry. My understanding, and the view of most people in this country, is that our neutrality comes from opposition to war, militarism and empire.

The Irish Neutrality League, set up by Connolly, Pearse and Markievicz, was set up in 1914 at the outset of the First World War because the people who went on to fight for the liberation of this country, in some cases laying down their lives to do so, opposed the slaughter of the First World War and militarism. They did not want to be involved with imperial blocks that sent young working-class people in their millions out to be slaughtered. That is what our neutrality is about.

In an apparently innocuous Bill about industrial development, and who could be against that, the Government is actually trying to integrate us more and promote more Irish involvement in the arms industry. We will get on to section 8, the part that deletes the requirement for the Government to be notified if the IDA or Enterprise Ireland promote or support companies engaged in the area of military and defence. It removes oversight of that area, which was not even discussed when pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill was done. That was sneaked in at the last minute and is going to remove oversight of involvement of Irish companies and State agencies in the promotion of the arms industry. We should not be involved in promoting that.

It was very clear when we rang the alarm bells about this - quite honestly this all could have been missed because the Government was engaged in a sleight of hand but luckily it was rumbled - that the Minister gave away the truth when he talked about small and medium enterprise in this country, whatever small indicates in this context, essentially getting in on the benefits of European defence expenditure. This is the European arms industry, which is being

ratcheted up in a very big way and, crucially, is implicated in the horrors we have seen visited on the Palestinian people during the genocide. He referenced things like drone technology as an area we want to get into. In case the Minister does not know, but of course he does, drone and digital technology and all that kind of stuff are absolutely central to the genocide in Gaza. It is absolutely central to what Israel is doing to the Palestinian people, to the modern warfare in what is happening between Ukraine and Russia, and the war in the Middle East started by Trump and so on. This is about us trying to cash in on a deadly industry that is about killing and murdering people using the most modern technology: AI, digital technology, drones and so on. We should not be promoting that. We should be promoting industries that are good for humanity and move us in the opposite direction from militarism, war, arms spending and so on, rather than further integrating into it.

I do not know if the article from *The Currency* has been mentioned but I quote it extensively. It was published earlier in the year and showed that in 2023 and 2024, millions of dual-use exports were sent to Israel and to the Israeli military from this country in the midst of a genocide. More recently, *The Currency* produced a new article showing that in the same two years, €28 million worth of dual-use technology - in other words technology that can be used by the military - was sent to Israeli defence and security companies. In other words, these are armed companies which produce the hardware and digital software and so on and so forth that the Israeli military uses, as we speak, to commit the genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians. I do not know if that more recent article has even been discussed in here yet. The dual-use exports were not just going to the Israeli military, they were also going to Israeli security and defence companies. Fair play to *The Currency*. What is excellent in the article is that it states that officials in the Department were warning the Government that end users were going to use them for military means in Israel. For example, from the FOI stuff I got back, officials were advising the Minister and the Department that the end user had direct ties to the Israeli defence industry, and their risk-register profile entry stated that it was believed the end user is at risk of diverting these dual-use goods to potential military-end uses. That was ignored.

5 o'clock

The officials could see where this stuff was going and that it could be implicated in the horrific crimes of genocide. It would appear the Government decided it did not want to know because we can benefit and that we want to move into and profit from this expanding area that involves killing people. I accept that after 2024, because of the uproar over the genocide and the pressure exercised on the Government, things began to change, but I do not trust the disposition of this Government. Look at its failure to impose economic sanctions. We are still doing €3 billion or €4 billion worth of trade with the Israeli regime, which is engaged in genocide. Do I trust the Government when it will now not even be notified about this stuff? No, I do not. That is why I moved these amendments and I am sure others will say they are doing it for similar reasons. We should not be engaging in and expanding our involvement in the deadly arms industry.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I have to echo some of Deputy Boyd Barrett's sentiments, particularly around the disguising of a massive policy shift in our neutrality under the guise of industrial development legislation. In recent discussions with the Minister, Deputy McEntee, around this, I quoted the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, who spoke about the changing face

of warfare. We know it is not just about building bullets that kill people now. It is much more complex and huge technological innovation is playing into the arms industry. It is not just bombs and bullets that kill people but everything behind that, around the technology and infrastructure of warfare. That is what we are dealing with and what we are pushing back on today.

I will speak to amendments Nos. 2 and 5, both of which introduce guardrails around that. Amendment No. 2 adds the following text: "No grant under this section will be made for consultancy services which relate to military or defence activities." Amendment No. 5 adds:

(8) No loans, investments or disposals of land shall be made by the IDA under this section to any company which engages in activities of military relevance, including defence manufacturing or providing military goods or services.

(9) Enterprise Ireland and the IDA shall not cause a company to be formed and registered under this section if the purpose of that company is to engage in activities of military relevance, including defence manufacturing or providing military goods or services.

The purpose of amendment No. 2 is to ensure grants for consultancy services for business are not for military-related purposes. The allowed purposes are technological innovation and digitalisation; environmental protection and sustainability; and business transformation, development and strategy. Our key concern in the Social Democrats is we are seeing militarisation creep into all of these aspects of businesses, particularly following the lead of the European Commission, which is actively seeking to integrate our tech innovation and industrial development as a European Union with the military and arms industries. That is not conspiracy or pie in the sky. That is overt and explicit policy direction coming from Brussels.

The amendment seeks to ensure Irish taxpayer money is not directed to arms companies or to helping companies become arms companies. What is too often lost in this discussion is that there is an opportunity cost. Every cent directed from business support funds, EU Cohesion Funds or research funds to military businesses is money that the Government does not have to support family-run companies which are trying to navigate rising business costs, help local SMEs expand or help medical start-ups conduct important research. It means people who would otherwise focus their talents and efforts on a business that benefits the environment, makes a medical good or creates and innovates to support society are instead encouraged to follow the money and use that talent and effort to create a war economy.

Amendment No. 5 further pushes that any material support provided by the IDA and Enterprise Ireland is not aimed at companies engaging in activities of military relevance, particularly that they do not take part in the formation of companies which do this. There is an inherent risk involved when Irish State agencies provide funding, lands or material supports, or become shareholders or create companies which engage in activities of military relevance.

The principles underpinning this are simple. We do not want to pivot our economy towards war and arms, and that is what this does by stealth and in disguise. It is turning our backs on neutrality. The Government is already doing that with the Defence Act by removing the triple lock but this is brazenly saying we want to abandon our neutrality, even though, of course, the Government is not admitting the removal of the triple lock is jettisoning our neutrality. On top of that, as a European member state, we have a choice right now when there is a clear direction of travel away from the peace project origins of the founding of the European Union towards

a project which has at its centre militarism, war, the arms industry and economies propped up by those. That is the direction of travel. There is no hiding that. Nobody is even trying to hide that in Brussels. We have a role as a European member state, and one of the few which are neutral, not to just go along with it and say, "Oh, that's where the money's going, we'd best follow that", but instead to say "No", push back against it and say that we do not stand for this and we will not stand for it. We must remind our European colleagues that we are a peace project. I hear from those in Cabinet time and again that the EU is the greatest peace project - well, they should act like it is and tell our European colleagues we will not do this. Do not just try to buy in because that is where the money is.

We are against the use of public funds to subsidise the arms industry and we understand the Government's approach seeks to cash in, essentially, on European funds for companies engaging in military activities. The arms industry has always been profitable and the level of profitability has never been the measure by which Government should approve State supports to companies engaging in military activities and creating goods for military use. The reason we require Government approval is based on the understanding that the creation, with public funds, of weapons that may be used in a manner over which we have no control is wrong. We also believe shaping our industrial development around the arms and military sector risks creating sector lock-in and reliance on arms for economic and industrial development, which can have serious consequences for our economies, for policies across Europe, for diplomacy and for defence.

Being one of 27 member states and one of the few neutral ones means being a constant reminder that this is a peace project, a Union founded in peace, not one which supports war and arms as a key economic indicator. We see this policy shift happening across the EU. What is not being spoken about when we talk about the billions for the defence sector is the cost. When we use Cohesion Funds, research funds and business support funds for military purposes, there is less money for the genuine social cohesion that the European project was born for. For important research and indigenous businesses which are not in the military sector, we must resist it and resist using it as a foundation for this gargantuan policy change.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: Our neutrality matters. I support amendments Nos. 1 to 5. We need to be conscious of the ramifications for our neutrality of what the Government is trying to push through. Currently, any engagement by Enterprise Ireland or the IDA with companies which engage in activities of military relevance must be done with the prior approval of the Government. This is not an argument that defence companies should be prohibited in Ireland, nor is it an argument for investing in our Defence Forces; it is an argument about public money and State assets. Therefore, ministerial oversight is critical.

I was not convinced by the Committee Stage debate that necessary safeguards were in place, and I do not think anybody across all parties in the committee was convinced. Why should the State finance or facilitate supports through its enterprise agencies for activity of this nature? There is already billions in funding available from the EU, for example, so why are we subsidising them? God knows there are many things in this country that need to be subsidised and supported. We talk to businesses every day of the week about competitiveness and about how they are struggling. Why then are we suggesting we open the doors to give the support that could be given to them to this when it threatens our neutrality?

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Alan Dillon): I thank the Deputies for tabling these amendments but I am unable to accept them. First, I will focus on the objectives of section 4 and 5.

Section 4 deals with the capacity of the enterprise development agencies, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, to provide environmental grants and consultancy grants. The objectives of these incentives for businesses are to invest in actions that drive decarbonisation and our national objectives with respect to green and digital transition. They also align with the Government's goals, as set out in the programme for Government, to support high-quality jobs, mitigate climate change and drive competitiveness. The proposals set out in section 4 are in no way related to military matters. Likewise, the ultimate objective of section 5 is to support jobs, economic growth and strong regional development.

Having listened to the Deputies, it is disingenuous to say that the proposal in this Bill is aligned to war, military matters or subsidies for the arms industry. That could not be further from the facts. Every substantial safeguard to protect Ireland's national security, reputation and international obligations remains fully in force. The Bill does not in any instance affect the Government's policy on military neutrality. If we look at the availability of suitable property solutions, we are looking at how we can centrally attract mobile FDI, particularly in the current highly, competitive international markets, and for companies to see Ireland as an attractive place in which to do business. In that context, the joint property ventures provided for in section 5 can play an important role in supporting job creation. Again, section 5 of this proposal is in no way related to military matters.

As a Government, we will continue to support Irish-owned companies to grow and scale, along with providing direct investment towards each step of their decarbonisation. At the same time, as global competition for FDI intensifies, Ireland needs to remain agile and ambitious to win investment. The purpose of the Bill is to support these objectives. Through its different sections, it amends different Acts to specify defined purposes. Applying exceptional conditions to unrelated supports, as proposed in these amendments, is piecemeal and is not coherent from a policy perspective. The amendments conflate unrelated issues. Deputy Boyd Barrett spoke about issues around export licences. These were substantially discussed on Committee Stage when the Minister was very clear on the export of dual-use items. The Department explicitly and carefully assesses export licence applications, having regard to their relevance, the regulations and criteria. Their authorisations are decided on that basis.

For the reasons I outlined, I will not be accepting these amendments.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Minister of State will have a more difficult time explaining the deletion of section 8. Let us take him at face value and say that these things are not connected. What, then, is the problem with our amendments? If the Government is talking about giving the IDA powers, for example, to set up DACs for purely benign purposes that have nothing to do with the arms industry or the military sector, why would it have a problem with our amendments? The Minister of State said there is no connection, so why does he not just accept them and we would all be happy? Nobody has a problem with the IDA or Enterprise Ireland providing grants - I do have problems with DACs on another level but we will set that aside for today - or in supporting the development of companies that are engaged in environmental research or other areas of research that are non-military and not related to the

defence sector and the areas that we are concerned about that might impinge on our neutrality. The reason the Government does not want to accept the amendments is that there is another agenda. It is to do with ReArm Europe. We will talk more about that. It was alluded to there by Deputy Gibney.

The €800 billion is a big pot on money that Ireland wants to move in on and seize potential benefits from, but it means contributing to an industry that visits death and destruction on people, and has done very recently. The Government was caught out in its involvement in that when arms companies in Ireland and the Israeli military itself got dual-use technology from this country, which was almost certainly used to kill Palestinian people during a genocidal massacre. I do not see why the Government would have a problem with our amendments if what the Minister of State said is true. When we look at the rest of the Bill, in particular what we will be discussing in a minute, the Government is engaged in a stealth manoeuvre here.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: The Minister of State accused us of being disingenuous and conflating issues. I would push back and say that it is the Government that is being disingenuous in putting this forward. Deputy Boyd Barrett makes a perfectly valid point. If the Government does not have an issue and this is not about military spending, then it should accept our amendments. Everything in the public eye tells us that we are seeing a shift in spending in Europe. This measure seems to me to be clearly jumping on that bandwagon and taking advantage of that move towards militarisation. We are seeing a multi-annual financial framework reorientated towards military spending. We are seeing the knock-on effects of that in smaller countries not getting access to the funding they should get access to because, of course, it is the largest countries that have the arms industries that will benefit most from this. The Government's response is not to say, "That is not fair and we should not be doing it." Its response is to say, "We want to get in on that cash as well; we want to jump in there." That is what is happening.

There is nothing coming from the Government around the fact that this means there is less money for social cohesion in Europe. Our best defence against the propaganda of war and the disinformation coming at us from Russia and elsewhere is to double down on investing in our communities, small businesses and the people who need this money to survive and thrive in life. It is not to direct this money towards bombs, bullets and all the associated industry related to war and arms. Whether the Minister of State admits it or not, that is what this legislation is trying to do. If he does not admit it, why will he simply not accept these amendments?

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: The Government is going in the wrong direction here. It is very pertinent. We are looking at this on the enterprise committee. Until 2024, at the height of genocide and ethnic cleansing, we were exporting weapons to Israel. That is the fact of the matter. Now, it is against the advice of the Government officials. There has to be an explanation provided as to why that has happened. That is the reason we are examining this in the enterprise committee.

The Minister of State is saying we should trust the Government, with the IDA and Enterprise Ireland, to do this. This does not make sense, and it will not make sense to the constituents of the Minister and State and me, and other people throughout this country. Money is needed for CAP and so many other things. The Government has decided that this is the direction it wants to go down. It wants to go down the route of providing subsidies, land and whatever is needed

and providing for consultancy services which relate to military or defence activities. Even if we were to pick out just one of those amendments, we are going to be paying consultancy services that relate to military and defence activities. The Government is on the wrong road.

Deputy Alan Dillon: For the purpose of this Bill, a lot of the matters being raised are unrelated to the specific amendments that have been tabled. We should be making it easier for our agencies, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, to meet their objectives. If that means providing for consultancy grants or environmental grants, that is very much a core objective of this Government in terms of our green and digital transition. The agencies are working closely with client companies as they continue to navigate these strategic challenges.

This proposed grant would be an important addition to their toolbox. International challenges are very much on the horizon due to geopolitical uncertainty. That, from everyone's understanding, is impacting supply chains and the speed of technology change. It is really important that our agencies are adapting, with the growing technology and the introduction of AI as a key consideration for many enterprises. It is really important as a State that we, ultimately, continue to support companies which are making that green transition or increasing their digital maturity. This is the essence of what we are trying to do within this Bill. For that reason, we will not be accepting these amendments.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Okay. The arguments have been made. I repeat that while the relevant sections we are trying to amend here, sections 4 and 5, do not explicitly refer to the arms industry and refer to relatively benign uses, we are asking for an assurance - the next section is the reason it throws doubt on these sections, and the Minister of State's decision to move out section 8 - as it does refer to, for example, consultancy grants around technological innovation, digitalisation and so on. What we are saying is in areas like that, they should be absolutely explicitly not for the military and defence sector. If grants, which could be up to €7.5 million for consultancies, €15 million in total, or land and property and so on, are not in any circumstances going to go to the security or defence industry, what is the problem with saying they will not? Why is the Minister of State refusing to accept the amendments? We are just asking for a safeguard against the use of this money by companies that would be engaged in those areas. Of course, I think he knows, and we will get on to the next section, that for many of these companies there is a grey area between digital technology, innovation in that area, and even so-called environmental stuff, and the military sector. There is a grey area that is exploited by those companies in order to produce dual-use technology, which is then used to kill people. That is where the relevance of *The Currency* articles and so on comes in, and the dual-use technology where officials were warning the Department that they think this will be used by the end user for military means even though the end user was saying "Of course not." The end use, of course, was an arms company deeply implicated in Israel's crimes.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 65; Níl, 78; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Aird, William.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Boland, Grace.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Brabazon, Tom.	

Brady, John.	Brennan, Brian.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brophy, Colm.	
Carthy, Matt.	Browne, James.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Burke, Colm.	
Collins, Michael.	Burke, Peter.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Butler, Mary.	
Cronin, Réada.	Butterly, Paula.	
Crowe, Seán.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Cullinane, David.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Cummins, Jen.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Daly, Pa.	Cahill, Michael.	
Devine, Máire.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Calleary, Dara.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Canney, Seán.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Ennis, Daniel.	Chambers, Jack.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Clendennen, John.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Connolly, John.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Cooney, Joe.	
Gould, Thomas.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Graves, Ann.	Currie, Emer.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Daly, Martin.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Healy, Seamus.	Dillon, Alan.	
Hearne, Rory.	Dolan, Albert.	
Kelly, Alan.	Fleming, Sean.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Foley, Norma.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Lawless, Paul.	Geoghegan, James.	
Lawlor, George.	Grealish, Noel.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Heneghan, Barry.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Heydon, Martin.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Keogh, Keira.	
Murphy, Paul.	Kyne, Seán.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Lahart, John.	
Nash, Ged.	Lawless, James.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Lowry, Michael.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Martin, Micheál.	
Nolan, Carol.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	McCarthy, Noel.	
O'Donoghue, Richard.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	McCormack, Tony.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McEntee, Helen.	
O'Hara, Louis.	McGrath, Séamus.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	

Ó Broin, Eoin.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Quaide, Liam.	Murphy, Michael.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Neville, Joe.	
Sherlock, Marie.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Stanley, Brian.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	O'Connor, James.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
Ward, Charles.	O'Meara, Ryan.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Shea, John Paul.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghail, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

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

Amendment declared lost.

Debate adjourned.

Visit of Moldovan Delegation

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I welcome the Deputy Prime Minister of Moldova, Cristina Gherasimov. She is here with the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, and colleagues. She is very welcome and I hope she enjoys the proceedings here in Leinster House.

Industrial Development (Amendment) and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2026: Report Stage (Resumed) and Final Stage

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 5, between lines 32 and 33, to insert the following:

“(3) No grant under this section will be made for consultancy services which relate to military or defence activities.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I move amendment No. 3:

In page 6, between lines 26 and 27, to insert the following:

“(c) not make loans to, invest monies in and sell, transfer, lease or otherwise dispose of land at its disposal to, a relevant company which engages in or promotes any activity of military relevance.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I move amendment No. 4:

In page 6, between lines 36 and 37, to insert the following:

“(c) not make loans to, invest monies in and sell, transfer, lease or otherwise dispose of land at its disposal to, a relevant company which engages in or promotes any activity of military relevance.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I move amendment No. 5:

In page 7, between lines 28 and 29, to insert the following:

“(8) No loans, investments or disposals of land shall be made by the IDA under this section to any company which engages in activities of military relevance, including defence manufacturing or providing military goods or services.

(9) Enterprise Ireland and the IDA shall not cause a company to be formed and registered under this section if the purpose of that company is to engage in activities of military relevance, including defence manufacturing or providing military goods or services.”

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendment No. 6 is out of order as it does not arise out of committee proceedings.

Amendment not moved.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 7 and 8 are related and may be discussed together, by agreement.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I move amendment No. 7:

In page 9, to delete lines 9 to 11.

This is really the key amendment and is from myself and Deputies Gibney and Lawlor. We all submitted the same amendment and it relates to our belief that the Government has not been honest with this House or with the public about the real purpose of this Bill. I want to repeat that in the pre-legislative scrutiny process there was no mention of this at all. It was brought in on Committee Stage, after the fact, and quite honestly, it could easily have been missed. The potential significance of it was not really advertised properly. Let us be clear, the Bill's explanatory memorandum states, "The Science and Technology Act 1987 will be amended to clarify the agencies' capacity to support dual-use, security and defence projects". It also refers to the removal of section 8 of that Act, which required that enterprise and development agencies secure "formal Government approval before they engage in, or promote, any activity of a primarily military relevance". That section would be deleted so that the agencies can promote, support and give money to companies engaged primarily in the military sector and they do not have to tell the Government. This last-minute amendment comes in at the same time as the Government is exposed in a freedom of information request from *The Currency* magazine which shows that more than €20 million worth of dual-use technology exports went out of this country to the Israeli military. Getting this information took quite a considerable period of time and credit is due to Niall Sargent from *The Currency* magazine for chasing this up and writing up the story. He exposes that officials in the Department were warning about the possible end use of this dual-use technology going to the Israeli military. At that point, just to remind people, in the middle of 2024, when this stuff was exposed, 35,000 people had been slaughtered. This was in the midst of a genocidal horror beyond imagination. At that time a decision was made to approve it anyway, despite the warnings from officials that this technology was going to the Israeli military which was engaged in slaughtering men, women and children in Gaza.

More recently, in the last couple of weeks, *The Currency* exposed that it was not only to the Israeli military but also to companies that provided weapons, arms and so on, to Israel. As I said already, an official warned the Department that the end user has "direct ties to the Israeli defence industry" and said that there was a risk of diverting these dual-use goods to potential military end uses. The article says that there were multiple denials from the end user but the end user was a "defence company with deep ties to the Israeli State and military". We can take it that it was probably Elbit Systems but that does not matter; it was clearly spelt out by an official that in the midst of a genocide, this was going to a company with deep ties to the state carrying out that genocide.

How are we supposed to trust a Government that made the decision to approve, despite the warnings about the possible end use of the technology? In other words, we were saying that if we can profit from it, we will go ahead. It really tells a story, quite honestly, about the Government's shift in position. How long have we been out on the streets, demanding that the Government take action against Israel and impose actual sanctions instead of just making rhetorical, tokenistic statements about support for the Palestinians? In actuality, the Government did not want to, and even now it does not want to do so. We are one of the biggest trading partners with the Israeli regime, involving billions of euro every year. We are one of the biggest partners in Europe. We do not want to stop trading with a state that is committing genocide, so that decision was made. Subsequently, because of the massive pressure on the streets and the public outrage, somebody decided that we had better just hold off on this a little bit but, simultaneously, we will make sure that the IDA and Enterprise Ireland can support companies and not have to let the Government know about it. Now the Government will not

know. It will put its head in the sand, deliberately. Hear no evil, see no evil and the supply of dual-use technology to end users who may be committing war crimes, crimes against humanity and even genocide can just continue because there is money to be made out of it.

I hate to say it but it is very difficult to put any other spin on what we are looking at here and the rationale behind it. The Minister described it as removing red tape but we need red tape when it comes to dual-use technology going to the State of Israel when it is engaged in genocide. In fact, we need it for technology going to the State of Israel at all, given its decades of crimes. We also need it for other states that have engaged in wars in the Middle East, against Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, and in actions to take out leaders in Venezuela and so on. Do we want to be sending dual-use technology to people involved in war mongering and war crimes, with all of the horror that involves and the economic costs it is now even imposing on ordinary people here? I say "No" and I think most people in this country say "No" to that.

We have heard much about the health service and its computers being hacked by the Russians. Why not develop digital technology in the health service to protect against cyberattacks instead of supporting the arms industry to send exports to companies committing war crimes?

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I want to speak first to some of the comments that have been made. It is so crazy to think that this legislation has nothing to do with dual-use goods, which is essentially the premise that has been put forward so far by the Minister of State. This is literally money for dual-use and it goes even further and allows Ireland to invest money in single-use. That is what the Government is doing. He also spoke about how it is easier for these institutions and State agencies to meet their objectives but if we are allowing them to engage with military purpose industry, they cannot be doing a very good job. If what we need is to pivot towards military use then we genuinely need to look at what the IDA and Enterprise Ireland are doing.

Amendment No. 7 proposes to retain subsection (5) of section 8 of the Science and Technology Act 1987, which requires Government approval for engaging in activities of military relevance. The subsection states:

The Agency shall not engage in or promote any activity of a primarily military relevance without the prior approval of the Government.

The Minister of State could not accept our earlier amendments, which provided for guardrails to prevent the State investing in the military industry. The provision in the Bill to delete this subsection of the 1987 Act knocks down any facade in that regard. Deleting this line facilitates exactly such investment. The Minister of State cannot continue to spin a story that this is not about investment in the military industry, a move towards militarisation or pivoting our economy towards military investment.

Ultimately, we do not know the consequences of the goods or technologies that could be produced under this legislation. The Bill as it stands ensures that such decisions will have no Government oversight and that IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland will be fully free to use supports that could be used to help a local agricultural business or a new retail shop or service company to support companies engaging in military activities, a sector that is already extremely profitable and the recipient of millions of euro of additional funding, particularly in recent years. We know that military goods are designed to be used in war and conflict. They are

designed for violence and, often, to maim and kill. In an effort to widen what is an acceptable use of taxpayer money, we risk victims of violence and conflict coming back to us to ask why the weapons, technology, goods and services used to hurt them were stamped with "Made in Ireland".

Additional evidence of this is found in an article in *The Journal* a couple of weeks ago detailing the comments by the Minister of State, Deputy Thomas Byrne, at an event in Strasbourg. Asked by the journalist whether there was a risk of Ireland having to contribute billions of euro to European defence spending, the Minister of State declined to endorse a specific figure, stating "I'm not going to go into figures like that because some of these figures can be bandied about." The article goes on to state:

However, Byrne acknowledged the broader concern.

He said Irish businesses have traditionally benefited when European countries increase spending on infrastructure and other major projects.

"That's not the case with defence spending, because we don't have a defence industry of any significance," Byrne said.

He said there are Irish companies operating in the sector and that the government is trying to increase their involvement so that "there's an economic benefit back" to Ireland.

Byrne said the government is changing legislation to allow Enterprise Ireland to advise companies in the defence sphere, while a new security clearance system will allow Irish companies to participate in European consortiums competing for defence contracts.

Nobody in the Government is trying to hide what it is doing, yet the Minister of State, Deputy Dillon, comes in here and suggests to us that we are conflating issues and being disingenuous. This is exactly why the Irish public grappled with the Nice and Lisbon treaties. It is exactly why we need to be active members of the European Union, consistently and constantly pushing for the upholding of the founding values of the Union of social justice and peace. That is what the Government is absolutely happy to leave in the dust while it trots forward on the path to militarisation, down which the EU is hell-bent on going. I have been mocked by the Minister of State's colleagues for using words like that and describing the situation as such but every piece of evidence makes clear to me that this is exactly what is happening and that the Government is not only not resisting it but happily embracing it.

I questioned two Commissioners at a meeting of the European affairs committee in January. They further confirmed all of this. The multi-annual financial framework is being redesigned to support defence spending, and that means less money will go to communities and small businesses. The competitiveness and cohesion funding - all of the funding - is being adjusted in such a way that we, as 27 member states, will spend more on arms. The Government is not working to ensure that does not happen but, rather, to ensure it gets in on it and gets a slice of the pie. It is willing to leave behind our proud tradition of Irish neutrality and to hollow it out until there is nothing left of it. By way of the Defence (Amendment) Bill and all the other legislation it is trying to push through, the Government is, in effect, trying to get us to a point where Ireland might be compared with Switzerland, which is said to be neutral but has a massive arms industry.

We do not want that here. Neutrality for the Irish people means not just that we are militarily neutral but that we do not support military arms development. Our companies should be founded, and supported to be founded, in ways that are for good. Going back to my earlier point, even in the consultancy part of this, we are drawing our talent away from positive forces in Irish society and positive advancements in science and technology and towards war. This issue is so fundamental to us, but the Government is willing just to toss it out there because it wants a slice of the European money pie.

Deputy George Lawlor: The deletion proposed in section 8 of the Bill is bizarre when one considers the Taoiseach's speech to the UN just a few days ago, where he stood up in front of the world and said the world will not forget the inaction on Gaza. A few days later, his Government is proposing to delete the following subsection in the 1987 Act:

The Agency shall not engage in or promote any activity of a primarily military relevance without the prior approval of the Government.

The proposal, in effect, is to take out the guardrails or safeguards that prevent our agencies for the promotion of enterprise and industry from dealing with companies that provide arms that will slaughter even more people in Gaza and elsewhere in Palestine.

In his remarks when rejecting amendments Nos. 1 to 5, inclusive, the Minister of State, in effect, threw himself under the bus in saying the provisions under discussion were in no way related to military matters. This particular subsection absolutely is related to military matters. It is as clear as day that it is related to military matters. We have been talking about the possibility of the Government not knowing about such a connection to military matters. In fact, the Government will not want to know about what is going on behind the scenes in the context of IDA Ireland or Enterprise Ireland potentially interacting and dealing with companies that are sending weapons to slaughter innocent men, women and children in Gaza.

In the current geopolitical climate, section 8 proposes a bizarre, callous and extraordinarily concerning deletion. It is an absolutely regressive step. It is removing a check on how taxpayers' money is spent and how that relates to our neutrality. The prohibition on State agencies engaging in or promoting activities of primarily military relevance without Government approval was enacted in 1987 as a statutory embodiment of our neutrality. It means the machinery of industrial policy, including grant aid, promotional activity and equity investment, which is hugely important to this country and to the agencies, cannot be turned towards military ends without an explicit political decision at Government level. Why is the Government now determined to unwind that principle? It is obvious that the reason is the €800 billion to which Deputy Gibney referred. It wants to get a piece of that filthy, poisonous pie that is going to kill so many people across the globe.

A separate Government approval is needed under the Control of Exports Act 2023. We cannot imagine the domestic market for military goods is terribly large, so most of what is produced off the back of the agencies' investment will absolutely be bound for the export market. Therefore, they will still need approval at that stage. However, we have learned that we cannot trust the Government on that count either. This is the Department that approved €20 million worth of dual-use exports to the IDF and the Israeli defence ministry at the height of the genocide in Gaza. It is clear that the export approval process is not much of a safeguard.

With that in mind, we certainly cannot support section 8 of the Bill. As I said, it is bizarre in the context of all the condemnation of the actions of the war criminal Netanyahu. Of course, we already saw similar when the Government delegates sat and listened to his diatribe at the United Nations in New York last week, when the representatives of every other decent Government across the globe, who did not salute the manner in which he went about his business, left the room and turned their back on Netanyahu, the war criminal who should be arrested if he ever arrives in this country.

This is a callous deletion. It gets rid of a safeguard we have long held as a country that is proud of its neutrality. The Minister of State simply must look again at this.

6 o'clock

The Government's previous amendments have certainly said that anything connected to military activity will not be countenanced. However, the Bill's provision is totally open to that and I urge the Minister of State to reject any removal or deletion within section 8 of the Act.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: It is highly unlikely and unusual for a government to want to give away powers. The question has to be asked why does the Government want to delete the following: "The Agency shall not engage in or promote any activity of primarily military relevance without the prior approval of the Government." The Government does not want to know what is happening in this space. It wants a free for all and it wants taxpayers' money to pay for it. This is completely wrong. I see that the two amendments have been grouped together. I have put in some wording in amendment No. 8 knowing that the Government would refuse to accept the other amendment. I have nothing left to say in this space other than to ask the Minister of State to please not delete the paragraph as stated. There is no rhyme nor reason to do that but the Government will have to answer to the Irish people.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Alan Dillon): I thank the Deputies for tabling these amendments, and as with the previous amendments, I cannot accept them. The Act's section 8(5) provision is ambiguous and creates ongoing practical difficulties for the agencies. It hinders the agency support by creating uncertainty about what engagement requires prior Government approval and what does not. This blanket provision is outdated, given the multilayered regulatory framework that now exists. Increasingly, the Defence Forces have procurement needs related to the defence and security technologies required to protect the infrastructure on which our economy and prosperity depend. In this debate, not one Deputy mentioned our requirements around investments in our Defence Forces. We are raising the level of ambition to where we can continue to protect our citizens, strengthen national security and deliver more capable and resilient Defence Forces. I think we all accept that the landscape is changing in terms of the operational needs of the Defence Forces and also the opportunities in domestic and European funding.

We have been very clear on the priorities, which are in relation to defence, security and resilience opportunity, and streamlining these procedures facilitates that. The agencies remain subject to ministerial directions under the Industrial Development Acts. We will also have robust mechanisms in place for rigorous project appraisals by the agencies, our export control regulation, ministerial powers and Government oversight, and defence procurement

safeguards. It is important that the agencies remain subject to these requirements under the Industrial Development Acts. Governance and oversight remain robust for agency project approval. This will ensure that every project is assessed carefully, transparently and consistently.

Deletion of section 5 of the 1987 Act, as proposed, will streamline the work of the agencies in supporting innovative SMEs and enterprises, including cutting-edge technologies of strategic importance to Ireland, such as cybersecurity, sensors, data analytics and maritime surveillance. That has been raised many times regarding our national security vulnerabilities.

I am unable to accept Deputy Conway Walsh's proposed amendment No. 8 because it would reintroduce the central ambiguity that the Bill is designed to remove. We should not delete any ambiguous statutory requirement and replace it with something that recreates the ambiguity. The section 8(5) requirement no longer reflects the reality of how innovation, research and industrial ecosystems operate. Instead of providing clarity, it has the opposite effect. It has prolonged legal ambiguity and encouraged excessive caution in the system when considering engagement with projects that involve emerging technologies with defence, security and resilience potential, and these are areas of importance for our Defence Forces.

Equally, the scope of Deputy Conway Walsh's amendment is open to interpretation and potentially is so broad that it would make the requirement challenging for agencies to interpret and burdensome for any administrative purpose, while the Bill is designed to streamline operations. Given the nature of the modern economy and the range of activities across civilian and dual-use activity, there is a potential for the Deputy's amendment to add an extra layer of bureaucracy to all engagements with a host of companies beyond those presumably targeted by the amendment, as the enterprise agencies would need to assess what is within the scope of statutory requirement and what is not. As a result, the work and focus of the enterprise agencies may be significantly hindered.

Ireland's approach to support for the sector will continue to be governed by a combination of existing policy frameworks, legal duties, governance standards, and oversight mechanisms, including the regime supporting export controls.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We intend to call a vote on this amendment so we will make sure we leave enough time to do so. Deputy Gibney prompted this thought. When I was in occupied Palestine in late 1987, during the first intifada, some young Palestinians the same age as me brought me to their home in a refugee camp near Hebron. There was no Hamas then. It did not appear until more than a decade later. In fact, there was no armed resistance from Palestinians at all. They were just young people being beaten and shot down by a regime that treated them as third-class citizens and dehumanised them in the most horrific way. They brought me to their home, through the barricades, with the Israeli military firing tear gas canisters. In the house, they showed me a tear gas canister and one of them told me to look at where it was made. It said, "Made in the USA." I was not involved in politics then, but in that moment my political education began. I started to see the relationship between what was being done to the Palestinians and the arms producers in the United States and western world providing the means to oppress people, which has led to all the horror we are seeing today.

These days, that horror is summed up by another person I met, a poet, Refaat Alareer, a Palestinian writer and literature teacher who taught Shakespeare. It was his anniversary

recently because he was killed by the Israelis. How did they kill him? They phoned him beforehand and said they were going to murder him. As he did not want his friends and family to be killed, he left where he was and walked outside. Now, using digital technology, that is what they do. They phone people and tell them they are going to kill them and then they do so by firing missiles. He had to leave where he was so that the missile did not hit everybody else. Do we want the technology implicated in doing that to people to say, "Made in Ireland"? I say we do not.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I will also keep my comments short. I will cut through what I would describe as a word salad in the Minister of State's answer. I call it for what it is, namely, deregulation. It is across Government policy but in this case, it is deregulation to open up Irish investment and Irish companies to manufacturing arms and dual-use goods. That is what the Government is doing. The Minister of State talks about the ambiguity, which is just insane to me. There is no evidence behind it. The Minister of State is not telling us. He is talking about it hindering things but he is not telling us how Enterprise Ireland and the IDA have been disadvantaged all these years by this one clause. Now, very conveniently and coincidentally at the same time there is increased defence spending available, the Government wants to get rid of it.

To suggest that none of us has spoken about the Defence Forces in our contributions is incorrect. As my party's defence spokesperson, I consistently speak about the underinvestment of the Government in Óglaigh na hÉireann. This Government and previous ones have led Óglaigh na hÉireann to the point where it is underfunded, with a crisis in recruitment and retention and without the capacity to even have ships in the sea at the moment.

The Minister of State should not talk nonsense about us ignoring our Defence Forces. We support level of ambition 2 funding in order that our Defence Forces can actually operate.

Deputy George Lawlor: Our country has built its reputation on providing humanitarian aid and engaging in peacekeeping. What is proposed will undermine and hugely damage Ireland's reputation. The Minister of State spoke about ambiguity. There is no ambiguity. The 1987 Act states, "The Agency shall not engage in or promote any activity of a primarily military relevance". Where is the ambiguity? By removing that, you remove every safeguard and the reputation we have built up over decades as a country that people can look to for humanitarian aid or the provision of peacekeepers. The Government is going to totally undermine that. The grenades and rockets that will land on the children of Gaza will have our name all over them because that is what the profits will dictate. I mean the profits in monetary terms. That is what this is all about, and we utterly reject it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Does Deputy Conway Walsh wish to say anything?

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: Deputy Gibney said what I was going to say.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 65; Níl, 78; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Aird, William.	

Bacik, Ivana.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Boland, Grace.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Brady, John.	Brennan, Brian.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brophy, Colm.	
Carthy, Matt.	Browne, James.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Burke, Colm.	
Collins, Michael.	Burke, Peter.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Butler, Mary.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cronin, Réada.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Crowe, Seán.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Cullinane, David.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Cummins, Jen.	Cahill, Michael.	
Daly, Pa.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Devine, Máire.	Calleary, Dara.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Canney, Seán.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Chambers, Jack.	
Ennis, Daniel.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Clendennen, John.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Connolly, John.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Cooney, Joe.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Gould, Thomas.	Currie, Emer.	
Graves, Ann.	Daly, Martin.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Healy, Seamus.	Dillon, Alan.	
Hearne, Rory.	Dolan, Albert.	
Kelly, Alan.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Fleming, Sean.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Foley, Norma.	
Lawless, Paul.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Lawlor, George.	Geoghegan, James.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Grealish, Noel.	
McGrath, Mattie.	Harris, Simon.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Heydon, Martin.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Keogh, Keira.	
Murphy, Paul.	Kyne, Seán.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Lahart, John.	
Nash, Ged.	Lawless, James.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Lowry, Michael.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
Nolan, Carol.	McCarthy, Noel.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Donoghue, Richard.	McCormack, Tony.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	McEntee, Helen.	

O'Gorman, Roderic.	McGrath, Séamus.	
O'Hara, Louis.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Quaide, Liam.	Murphy, Michael.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Neville, Joe.	
Sherlock, Marie.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Stanley, Brian.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	O'Connor, James.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
Ward, Charles.	O'Meara, Ryan.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Shea, John Paul.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghail, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

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

Amendment declared lost.

An Ceann Comhairle: As the time for the debate on the Bill has expired, I am required to put the following question in accordance with the order of the Dáil of 29 September 2026: "That Fourth Stage is hereby completed and the Bill is hereby passed." Is that agreed?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is not agreed.

Question put: :

The Dáil divided: Tá, 78; Níl, 64; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Bennett, Cathy.	

Brennan, Brian.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brophy, Colm.	Brady, John.	
Browne, James.	Buckley, Pat.	
Burke, Colm.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Peter.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Butler, Mary.	Collins, Michael.	
Butterly, Paula.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Chambers, Jack.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Clendennen, John.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Connolly, John.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Cooney, Joe.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Currie, Emer.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Daly, Martin.	Gould, Thomas.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Graves, Ann.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Healy, Seamus.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Hearne, Rory.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kelly, Alan.	
Foley, Norma.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Geoghegan, James.	Lawless, Paul.	
Grealish, Noel.	Lawlor, George.	
Harris, Simon.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Heydon, Martin.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Kyne, Seán.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lahart, John.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lawless, James.	Nash, Ged.	
Lowry, Michael.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Nolan, Carol.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McGrath, Mattie.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	O'Rourke, Darren.	

Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murphy, Michael.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Neville, Joe.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Connor, James.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

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

Question declared carried.

Council of the European Union Decision: Motions

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Colm Brophy): I move:

That Dáil Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

Proposal for a Council Decision on the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Union and the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the return and readmission of

persons who do not, or no longer, fulfil the conditions for entry, presence, or residence in the territory of either Party,

a copy of which was circulated to each member of Dáil Éireann on 24th September, 2026.

This motion seeks Dáil Éireann's approval for Ireland to opt in to the European Council decision on the signing of the agreement between the European Union and the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the return and readmission of persons who do not, or no longer, fulfil the conditions for entry, presence, or residence in the territory of either party and European Council decision on the conclusion of the agreement between the European Union and the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the return and readmission of persons who do not, or no longer, fulfil the conditions for entry, presence, or residence in the territory of either Party.

I am bringing this motion on behalf of the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, who spoke on this matter in the Seanad yesterday. These proposals have a Title V legal basis in the area of freedom, security and justice under the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. As Deputies will be aware, this means that unlike other EU member states, Ireland is not automatically bound by measures in this area. Rather, Ireland can decide whether to opt in to such measures under Protocol No. 21 or by the three-month deadline of 8 October 2026 and that is the subject of the motion before the House.

Ireland is committed to establishing a system of migration that is fair, effective and efficient. Central to this system is a robust and credible policy on return, including readmission. Readmission is a central element of the returns process at both national and EU level. It forms a key element of the migration and asylum pact and its aim is to enhance communication and co-operation with third countries. Readmission agreements are fundamental to this objective and form an important aspect of the external dimension of migration policy. They play a valuable role in the fight against irregular migration by facilitating the admission of persons residing without authorisation in a member state to their own country of origin. They facilitate and expedite the enforcement of return decisions in respect of irregular migrants and may also function as an incentive for countries of origin or transit to enhance their migration control.

At present, Ireland is party to 12 EU-level readmission agreements including with Hong Kong, the Macao Special Administrative region of the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Albania, Sri Lanka, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Montenegro, the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Georgia, and in 2025, Ireland adopted a decision for the EU to enter into negotiations for a readmission with Kazakhstan, which I understand is progressing well.

To date, Nigeria is in the top five countries whose nationals applied for asylum in Ireland. Ireland and the Federal Republic of Nigeria have a strong history of good co-operation on returns and readmission. In 2001, we signed a bilateral agreement that sought establish a formal framework for readmissions and related immigration matters. While this was never officially ratified by Nigeria, the Nigerian authorities have demonstrated good co-operation on readmission of their citizens. Nigeria remains a priority country for Ireland in relation to migration co-operation and this readmission agreement would support Ireland's efforts in driving increased, improved and sustained co-operation.

As outlined by the Minister in the Seanad yesterday, the aim of this readmission agreement is to establish rapid and effective procedures for the return and readmission of Nigerian nationals from EU member states and EU nationals from Nigeria when they no longer have the legal right to enter, stay, or reside in the other party's territory. The agreement, which will be valid for a period of five years and renewable by mutual agreement of the parties, seeks to strengthen co-operation on migration management, combat irregular migration, human trafficking and migrant smuggling, facilitate the safe, orderly, and efficient return of persons without legal residence rights and to promote voluntary return and sustainable reintegration. It seeks to put clear obligations on the parties to accept the return of their own nationals, as well as timelines for the issuance of travel documents or biometric temporary passports, or both, as well as how nationality is to be determined. These are elements of the return and readmission process that are critical to its success.

Importantly, the agreement contains safeguards in relation to human rights, data protection, governance and monitoring. Central to the agreement is that it will be applied in such a way as to ensure respect for both human rights and for the obligations and responsibilities of the EU, its member states and Nigeria under international law. Ireland has and always and will continue to advocate for the protection of fundamental human rights and I am satisfied this agreement adequately does so.

Furthermore, the agreement does not preclude any memorandum of understanding, arrangement or agreement between Nigeria and individual member states on matters falling outside its scope. In order to facilitate the implementation of the agreement, there is also the possibility for Nigeria and individual member states to conclude bilateral implementing protocols. Deputies should be aware that this readmission agreement has not been formally adopted at EU level - it is likely at some time in November. Only after this formal adoption, will the agreement come into effect.

Opting in to these proposals is in line with our declared commitment to participating in Title V measures wherever possible and is a demonstration of our pledge to protect and promote EU values in the area of freedom, security and justice. It also demonstrates our strong solidarity with our EU partners, our firm commitment to EU values and Ireland's greater alignment with the EU in relation to migration management.

Deputy Matt Carthy: My party is on record as saying that we believe in a managed migration system. We believe in the first instance that this should be guided by Irish priorities, by the needs and wishes of the Irish people and by an Irish government rather than the European Union. The Minister of State's stated objective with which he concluded a speech in terms of having EU alignment in respect of migration management - is a mistake because it ignores the realities of our own situation and the fact that we are a divided island. Part of our country is under British administration and we are part of a common travel area that the EU framework takes no account of whatsoever. Sometimes that is misrepresented by the Minister for justice and others saying that we oppose collaboration at any level with the EU. The Minister knows that while why we oppose signing up to the EU migration and asylum pact in its entirety, we did support signing up to those areas where it made sense to do so, namely, in respect of returns policy and Eurodac, the sharing of information. We agree with individual measures such as the proposition that is before us to today. That does not diminish the primary point that migration should be dealt with a national level.

I fear that this move towards EU alignment will mean that we will get readmission agreements only when they are agreed at EU level and we will not see the level of proactivity that should be driven at Irish Government level. The one state with which we absolutely do need a returns agreement is our nearest neighbour. The Ministers are on record as saying that between 80% and 90% of our international protection applicants actually come via that state. There has been no sense of urgency on the part of Government to deliver that.

We recognise that the integrity of the immigration system depends on decisions being implemented consistently and fairly. Where an individual has been through the international protection process, has had his or her application fully and fairly assessed and has been found not to have a case for protection, it is important that returns decisions are made and that those decisions are enforced through deportations. That principle must apply to all countries, including Nigeria. The problem is that this State has had a very poor record over recent years when it comes to actually enforcing deportations, even tracking visa overstays and Government not providing or being willing to provide at least any of the data that would be necessary. That undermines the migration and international protection system. In many cases of which we are aware, the authorities cannot say whether people subject to deportation orders have even left the State or the country at all and there is a significant disparity between the number of deportation orders actually signed and the number for which we have confirmed deportations. For example, there were 4,700 orders last year. That is the figure that Ministers will put up in lights but they do not outline that there were only 434 deportations. As of 18 September of this year, 3,381 orders were signed but there just 356 actual deportations.

This proposed EU-Nigeria readmission agreement seeks to establish an agreed procedure for returns to and from Nigeria. Effective returns agreements are necessary for those who do not have a right to international protection and those who are otherwise unlawfully present in the State. To reiterate the point made by the Minister of State, these can be agreed at state level. It is not a necessity that they be done at EU level and I reiterate that we should be looking at those states that are most applicable to Ireland rather than those that might be applicable to other EU states and might become the priority of the Commission. We know that the majority of Nigerian applicants for international protection in recent years have been found not to qualify for national protection, albeit a minority has been granted protection for very obvious reasons. We have to recognise that conditions actually vary across Nigeria, which is a huge country, and that there is a necessity for each case to be assessed on its individual merits but it also remains essential that proper procedures exist to facilitate returns where an application for international protection has been returned. Supporting the returns that do not have a right to international protection does not deny the reality that in some parts of in Nigeria, there continue to be extreme levels of violence linked to Boko Haram and the jihadist militant group ISWAP and therefore it is important to remember that and give people the assurance that the policies and returns are put in place only when somebody has been through the international protection system or the cases have been assessed in the individual, where non-refoulement obligations are respected and where it has been determined that a person does not have a right to remain in the State. In this context, there is an obligation on us to ensure that there is full transparency around return decisions and proper monitoring of outcomes and accountability in terms of how these agreements are implemented.

We want to ensure that we have an immigration system that is fair, rules-based and human rights-compliant and that means ensuring that those who are genuinely in need of international

protection receive it, and they are treated with dignity and respect and are encouraged and supported to integrate into our society but it also means ensuring that deportations and return decisions are tracked and enforced. The biggest problem at the moment in respect of the wider international protection system is the time it takes to process applications. As I mentioned in an earlier debate, there is now a record backlog in IPAT applications. We are told that there are in excess of 21,000 appeals. That alongside the failure to monitor and enforce deportations still needs to be addressed and I urge the Government to prioritise those two issues alongside the bilateral arrangements with Great Britain that we need to see formalised.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I welcome the motion and I thank the Minister of State for bringing it before us. Ireland's return arrangements with Nigeria date back to 2001. They were never ratified by Nigeria and it depends on goodwill. This agreement replaces goodwill with a legal obligation. Last year, Nigeria was the second largest source of protection applications here with 1,940, or almost one in seven, applications. Across the European Union, Ireland is one of the four main destinations for Nigerian applicants so this agreement matters more to Ireland than most member states. It commits Nigeria to readmit its own nationals who have no right to remain in Europe. It works both ways though and it includes safeguards on human rights, data protection and monitoring. It sits within a wider EU partnership with Nigeria on investment, trade and legal migration.

The motion is part of the Minister's wider reforms to make the asylum system faster and fairer and to restore public confidence. Protection must be there for those who genuinely need it but when someone who has had a full and fair hearing and has been refused, that decision has to mean something. The Irish people are generous and they want a system that is fair and that works. They lose faith when decisions are not enforced. Clearly no country can do this alone so the return depends on co-operation with countries of origin, with our EU partners and with the UK with whom we share the common travel area. In July, six men were returned from Dublin to Lagos through the Frontex operation from Rome. That is what working together looks like.

I ask that the Department reports annually to this House on returns to Nigeria under this agreement, including voluntary ones, and that the Minister of State continues to work with the EU and our UK partners to establish more return agreements.

We should also work closely with the Home Secretary to develop joint protocols so that people who are unsuccessful inside the common travel area can be safely returned.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Colm Brophy): To reiterate, and as I highlighted in my opening remarks, a firm, fair and effective immigration system is a central priority for the Government. Fundamental to the system is that our immigration laws are robust and enforced. People must be able to have faith in the integrity of our immigration system and how it addresses individuals who refuse to leave the State when they are ordered to do so. The European Council has consistently highlighted the need for a unified, comprehensive and effective policy on return and readmission, and Ireland remains committed to achieving the same. Readmission agreements play a very important role in the fight against irregular migration and are fundamental to the development of an effective policy on returns.

The readmission agreement contains clear and unambiguous, legally binding obligations that are necessary for two purposes. The first is to ensure rapid and effective procedures for the identification and return of persons, including not only nationals of EU member states and Nigeria, but also third-country nationals and stateless persons illegally entering or remaining on the parties' territories. The second is to facilitate the transit of persons to be returned to and from a third country in a spirit of co-operation.

Ireland has previously opted into 12 EU-wide readmission agreements. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, I believe that opting into this EU readmission agreement with Nigeria would further highlight Ireland's long-standing commitment to a common EU-wide approach to migration, and would support our aim to increase the level of returns of illegally staying third-country nationals to third countries.

In answer to Deputy Carthy's point, I believe there is strength in unity and in the EU working together. I know that the Deputy's party does not believe that, and that it was very selective in what it opted into supporting EU-wide. There is one thing that is always worth bearing in mind, as I have said to Deputy Carthy before in other contributions, and I was reminded of it when listening to Prime Minister Burnham talking in the last couple of days. The one country that tried to do this alone was the UK, and the one country that suffered most out of it was the UK. I agree with Deputy Devlin's remarks. It is vital for us to build our relationship by ensuring that we develop our existing good co-operation with the UK. However, in terms of the strength that we get through working together, that strength is there with our European partners. I believe an EU-wide approach to migration is what is essential.

Opting into these Council decisions reinforces Ireland's effort in ensuring ongoing co-operation with the Federal Republic of Nigeria and will continue to build upon the previous good co-operation on returns that we had with the Nigerian authorities. I consider it is important for Ireland to opt into these decisions in order to show solidarity with our EU partners and to ensure Ireland's own interest in enforcing our immigration law. It will also demonstrate Ireland's ongoing commitment to achieving a common EU-wide solution to migration, which is already evidenced by our opting into the EU asylum and migration pact. A well-functioning returns system, fully and seamlessly integrated with our new common European asylum system, is essential.

I again highlight that the agreement will be applied in such a way as to ensure respect for human rights and the obligations and responsibilities of the EU, its member states and Nigeria under the relevant international instruments applicable to the parties. The protection of the rights of persons after their readmission in compliance with the obligations under those international instruments is of particular importance and is central to the agreement. Therefore, I hope the House can support the exercise of Ireland's opt-in in respect of these measures. I thank the Deputies for their consideration of this matter.

Question put and agreed to.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Colm Brophy): I move:

That Dáil Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of

freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

Proposal for a Council Decision on the signing of the Agreement between the European Union and the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the return and readmission of persons who do not, or no longer, fulfil the conditions for entry, presence, or residence in the territory of either Party,

a copy of which was circulated to each member of Dáil Éireann on 24th September, 2026.

Question put and agreed to.

7 o'clock

Electricity Regulation (Climate Action and Connection to Distribution and Transmission Systems) Bill 2025: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to Second Stage of the Electricity Regulation (Climate Action and Connection to Distribution and Transmission Systems) Bill 2025, taken on 24 September 2026. On the question, "That the Bill be now read a Second Time", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

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

The Dáil divided: Tá, 65; Níl, 78; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Aird, William.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Boland, Grace.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Brady, John.	Brennan, Brian.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brophy, Colm.	
Carthy, Matt.	Browne, James.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Burke, Colm.	
Collins, Michael.	Burke, Peter.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Butler, Mary.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cronin, Réada.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Crowe, Seán.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Cullinane, David.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Cummins, Jen.	Cahill, Michael.	
Daly, Pa.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Devine, Máire.	Calleary, Dara.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Canney, Seán.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Chambers, Jack.	
Ennis, Daniel.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	

Farrelly, Aidan.	Clendennen, John.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Connolly, John.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Cooney, Joe.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Gould, Thomas.	Currie, Emer.	
Graves, Ann.	Daly, Martin.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Dillon, Alan.	
Healy, Seamus.	Dolan, Albert.	
Hearne, Rory.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Kelly, Alan.	Fleming, Sean.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Foley, Norma.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Lawless, Paul.	Geoghegan, James.	
Lawlor, George.	Grealish, Noel.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Heneghan, Barry.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Heydon, Martin.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Keogh, Keira.	
Murphy, Paul.	Kyne, Seán.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Lahart, John.	
Nash, Ged.	Lawless, James.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Lowry, Michael.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
Nolan, Carol.	McCarthy, Noel.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Donoghue, Richard.	McCormack, Tony.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	McEntee, Helen.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McGrath, Séamus.	
O'Hara, Louis.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Quaide, Liam.	Murphy, Michael.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Neville, Joe.	
Sherlock, Marie.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Stanley, Brian.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	O'Connor, James.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
Ward, Charles.	O'Meara, Ryan.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Shea, John Paul.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghail, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	

	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Ciarán Ahern and Robert O'Donoghue; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Question declared lost.

Public Transport and Fare Increases: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Pa Daly on Tuesday, 29 September 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

recognises that:

- public transport is an essential public service and should be affordable and accessible to all;
- investment in public transport is critical to fairness, social inclusion, balanced regional development and reducing emissions; and
- the best way to increase public transport use is to make services more affordable, reliable, accessible and more widely available;

notes that:

- households, workers, students, pensioners and families continue to face significant cost of living pressures, with rising costs across housing, energy, childcare and everyday essentials;
- the Government has chosen to increase the cost of public transport for those who rely on it, and at a time when fuel costs are spiralling out of control;
- the National Transport Authority (NTA) has acknowledged that increasing fares will result in fewer people using public transport;
- affordable public transport helps to reduce household costs, tackle transport poverty and help workers and families cope with the rising cost of living; and
- commuters are being asked to pay higher fares while continuing to endure unreliable and overcrowded services, including so-called "ghost buses" that simply fail to turn up, leaving workers, students and families stranded and out of pocket;

further notes that:

- the Government has prioritised pay rises for public transport chief executive officers in conjunction with fare increases for commuters;
- this Government have failed to provide adequate funding to the NTA to both expand services, and maintain affordable fares;
- despite repeated promises, the rollout of improved public transport services has slowed significantly, with concerns raised regarding delays to the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan and promised rural transport improvements;
- communities across rural Ireland continue to experience poor connectivity, inadequate services and a lack of viable alternatives to private car ownership;
- this failure comes amidst repeated examples of waste, mismanagement and spiralling costs within the transport system, including the write-off of approximately €50 million arising from a failed public transport Information Technology project;
- affordable, reliable and accessible public transport delivers significant social, economic and environmental benefits by reducing congestion, lowering emissions, supporting regional development and connecting people with employment, education, healthcare and social opportunities; and
- free public transport for children and young people would ease financial pressures on families, increase mobility, improve access to opportunities and encourage lifelong use of public transport; and

calls on the Government to:

- immediately cancel all planned public transport fare increases;
- introduce free public transport for all children and young people under 18 years of age;
- provide adequate funding to the NTA to ensure affordable fares and expanded services are delivered together;
- deliver better, more reliable and more frequent bus and rail services;
- accelerate investment in rural public transport and fast-track the expansion of the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan; and
- improve accessibility across the public transport network so that it works for disabled passengers, older people, families, rural communities and all users.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 2:

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

"affirms Government's efforts to:

- deliver a more frequent, reliable, accessible and sustainable public transport network;
- rollout contactless fare payments on all public transport, and keep fares low and affordable;

- place the Public Service Obligation (PSO) programme on a more sustainable footing;
- support households and businesses through addressing congestion; and
- work to address Ireland's climate targets;

notes that:

- the Government is committed to the delivery of major public transport projects, as evidenced by last year's review of the National Development Plan (NDP) allocation of €24.3 billion to transport projects from 2026 to 2030;
- while the Government has allocated an unprecedented level of investment in transport, representing an almost 87 per cent increase as compared to the previous five-year period, investment decisions will always require a degree of sequencing and prioritisation of individual projects;
- for public transport infrastructure, there is over €12 billion in funding in the NDP from 2026 to 2030, this represents more than double the amount provided in the previous five years;
- the funding in the NDP will provide for the progression of a number of major public transport projects over this period, including the commencement of construction of MetroLink, Luas Finglas, the Dublin Area Rapid Transit (DART)+ Programme and the Western Rail Corridor from Athenry to Claremorris, as well as the continued implementation of the Cork Area Commuter Rail Programme and the BusConnects programmes across Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford cities;
- this funding will see the new DART+ Fleet rollout next year, as well as enabling early construction work to commence on DART+ West next year;
- on public transport services, PSO journeys have continued to grow steadily, reaching a record 363.5 million passenger journeys by the end of 2025, this represents an increase of 6 per cent or almost 20 million journeys over the 2024 total of 343.6 million, this sustained and significant growth in passenger numbers underlines the extent to which people are increasingly relying on public transport and demonstrates the critical importance of maintaining and investing in the network to meet this demand;
- Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan is another strong example of progress, delivering exponential growth in rural transport since its launch in 2022, 185 new and enhanced services have been introduced, resulting in almost 8 million passenger journeys in 2024, where Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan services have been implemented, patronage rose by 38 per cent from 2023 to 2024, and is up by 165 per cent compared to early 2019;
- passenger fare revenue is a critical component of the funding base, and is essential to maintaining the financial sustainability of the network into the future;
- since 2022, passengers have benefited from a 20 per cent cost of living fare reduction, extension of the 90-minute fare, a 50 per cent discount for Young Adults and Students, free travel for children under nine years of age, and extensions to the eligibility of the Free Travel Scheme, which is run separately by the Department for Social Protection;

— even following the 2026 adjustment, fares remain approximately 8 per cent lower in real terms than they were eight years ago, and the additional revenue generated through this determination together with continued Exchequer investment, will help the National Transport Authority (NTA) manage rising operating costs, improve capacity and reliability on existing services, and continue the rollout of new services;

— in 2025 alone, 363.5 million passenger journeys were made on the Transport For Ireland network – this level of demand places significant pressure on the funding required to sustain and expand services, and underlines why fare revenue is an essential component of the overall funding model;

— public transport remains highly competitive and affordable, the fare changes support continued network expansion and climate objectives by funding future improvements;

— the Government recognises that an equitable and reliable public transport network plays a vital role in encouraging a shift away from private car use, it is essential that the public transport system remains well funded and responsive to passenger needs and adequate fare revenue is essential to support this; and

— the NTA continually works with operators to improve efficiency and maximise value for money from both fare revenue and public investment, however, public transport services have expanded significantly in recent years, and operating costs have increased substantially, a sustainable public transport network requires an appropriate balance between fare revenue and Government funding to support continued growth and investment."

- (Minister for Transport)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding public transport and fare increases. On Tuesday, 29 September 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the motion be agreed to", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 77; Níl, 65; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
Brophy, Colm.	Buckley, Pat.	
Browne, James.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butterly, Paula.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Crowe, Seán.	

Byrne, Thomas.	Cullinane, David.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cummins, Jen.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Daly, Pa.	
Calleary, Dara.	Devine, Máire.	
Canney, Seán.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Chambers, Jack.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Clendennen, John.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Connolly, John.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Currie, Emer.	Gould, Thomas.	
Daly, Martin.	Graves, Ann.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dillon, Alan.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dolan, Albert.	Healy, Seamus.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Hearne, Rory.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kelly, Alan.	
Foley, Norma.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Geoghegan, James.	Lawless, Paul.	
Grealish, Noel.	Lawlor, George.	
Heneghan, Barry.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Heydon, Martin.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Kyne, Seán.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lahart, John.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lawless, James.	Nash, Ged.	
Lowry, Michael.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Nolan, Carol.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Murphy, Michael.	Quaide, Liam.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Neville, Joe.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Connor, James.	Tóibín, Peadar.	

O'Donnell, Kieran.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

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

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: : "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to"

The Dáil divided: Tá, 76; Níl, 66; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
Brophy, Colm.	Buckley, Pat.	
Browne, James.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butterly, Paula.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Cullinane, David.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cummins, Jen.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Daly, Pa.	
Calleary, Dara.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Chambers, Jack.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Clendennen, John.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Connolly, John.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Cooney, Joe.	Farrell, Mairéad.	

Crowe, Cathal.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Currie, Emer.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Daly, Martin.	Gould, Thomas.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Graves, Ann.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Healy, Seamus.	
Fleming, Sean.	Hearne, Rory.	
Foley, Norma.	Kelly, Alan.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Geoghegan, James.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Grealish, Noel.	Lawless, Paul.	
Heneghan, Barry.	Lawlor, George.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Keogh, Keira.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Kyne, Seán.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Lahart, John.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Lawless, James.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lowry, Michael.	Mythen, Johnny.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Nash, Ged.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McCormack, Tony.	Nolan, Carol.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
Moynihan, Michael.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Moynihan, Shane.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Murphy, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Neville, Joe.	Quaide, Liam.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Connor, James.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	Ward, Mark.	
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		

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

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

Question declared carried.

Windfall Tax on the Excess Profits of Energy Companies: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Jennifer Whitmore on Wednesday, 20 September 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- Irish households continue to face severe financial strain in the face of high and rising electricity prices;
- the average monthly wholesale electricity prices in Ireland have increased by 9.6 per cent in August, 2026 alone, and are up by 77 per cent year-on-year;
- retail electricity prices in Ireland were already the highest in Europe, with households paying an average of €480 per year more than the European Union (EU) average;
- retail electricity prices continue to rise rapidly, with a succession of eight providers having announced price increases in recent weeks, some of these increases in the double digits;
- a 1,000-litre fill of home heating oil now costs approximately €1,600, up more than 60 per cent in just the past year alone;
- according to the Central Statistics Office, the cost of household energy in Ireland has risen by a whopping 70 per cent in the past five years; and
- 323,559 Irish households were in electricity arrears in June according to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, amounting to around one in seven households;

further notes that:

- the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) recorded a pre-tax profit of €445.6 million for the first half of 2026, up from €351.6 million in the same period last year;
- it has recently been confirmed that the ESB Chief Executive Officer could see his salary hiked by a total of €161,000 by 2028, with a €90,000 increase to €410,000 per year having already been sanctioned;

— Energia recorded a pre-tax profit of €70 million for the second quarter of 2026, up 25 per cent year-on-year;

— Bord Gáis Energy recorded pre-tax profits of €50 million for the first six months of this year; and

— these kinds of bumper profits, and gold-plated salaries, are indicative of surging profits in the sector;

recognises that wholesale electricity prices are dictated largely by the cost of gas, meaning that energy companies that produce electricity from other sources, including renewables, can experience significant windfall gains when gas prices are high, as they are at present;

furthermore, notes that:

— the Government legislated in 2023, to introduce a temporary solidarity contribution and a cap on market revenues to clamp down on windfall gains in the energy sector;

— those measures, despite being in place for a relatively short period of time, raised a combined €456 million; and

— the Minister for Finance, has suggested that the State should wait for a joint EU approach to windfall taxes on the excess profits of energy companies, but Portugal has already moved ahead and introduced its own windfall tax; and

calls on the Government to:

— legislate to reintroduce both a market revenue cap and a temporary solidarity contribution, putting them on an independent statutory footing under Irish law that extends their operation for the period from 1st March, 2026 to 31st December, 2027; and

— use funds raised from taxing the windfall gains on energy companies to provide emergency relief to struggling individuals and families by immediately introducing a €400 energy credit, targeted at households earning up to €70,000.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

notes that the Government:

— remains deeply concerned about the conflict in the Middle East and its impact on energy prices;

— is acutely aware of the impact on households and businesses of the recent increases in the cost of energy, and is actively monitoring the current geopolitical situation and its impact on costs;

— has taken significant action to help households and businesses with the cost of fuel and energy by introducing one of the most comprehensive support packages in the European Union (EU); and

— affirms that energy affordability is a priority, with the Energy Affordability Action Plan to be submitted to Government in the coming weeks and consideration ongoing of supports for household; and

further notes that:

— the ongoing conflict in the Middle East has caused international wholesale gas prices to increase which has a significant knock-on impact on retail electricity prices;

— supplier hedging strategies have and are continuing to help cushion households from the full volatility in international wholesale energy markets;

— price setting by electricity suppliers, including standing charges is a commercial and operational matter for the companies concerned and each such company has its own different approach to pricing decisions over time, in accordance with factors such as, their overall company strategic direction and costs such as, staffing, tax, and infrastructure;

— the Government understands that any price increase can be a challenge for households and businesses;

— for that reason, the Government has taken action to help households and businesses with the cost of fuel and energy;

— extensions to the package of temporary fuel supports have brought the total cost of these measures to over €1.4 billion and are helping to reduce the cost burden at the petrol pump;

— successive budgets have provided targeted support to help households with energy costs;

— in Budget 2026, key measures included an extension until 2030 of the 9 per cent Value-Added-Tax rate currently applied to gas and electricity bills, enhanced social protection payments, including an increase to the Fuel Allowance weekly rate and an expansion in the eligibility rules, and a record allocation of €640 million for the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) retrofit schemes;

— at the same time, additional retrofitting supports have been rolled out to further help households, capital expenditure of over €2 billion has delivered over 287,000 home energy upgrades from 2019 to the end of August 2026, including over 39,500 fully funded upgrades for households at risk of energy poverty under the Warmer Homes Scheme;

— in January this year, we expanded and reformed retrofitting schemes to ensure more homeowners can receive grants, the new measures include, increased attic and wall insulation supports, an increased grant of €12,500 for heat pump installation, and new grants for windows and doors;

— almost 89,000 applications have been processed to the end of August 2026, an increase of 116 per cent on the same period last year;

— this year to the end of August, 2026, almost 42,000 homes have been upgraded through SEAI schemes, including over 6,800 homes at risk of energy poverty under the Warmer Homes Scheme;

— the latest Eurostat report, (comparing electricity prices across the EU), outlines that Ireland had the fifth highest for household electricity prices in the second half of 2025, when adjusted to take account of the 'Purchasing Power Standard' (i.e. practical affordability – taking account of household income);

— the four biggest energy retailers have confirmed that hardship funds and focused measures are in place for any customers in difficulty;

— switching energy supplier or plan could save the average electricity and gas customers up to €700 and €400 (respectively) annually;

— protections are in place for customers experiencing difficulties in paying their bills and households struggling with their bill, are strongly encouraged to engage with their supplier;

— the Department of Social Protection can also provide support through the Additional Needs Payment to help households meet expenses, including difficulties with fuel bills;

— the Government has also established the National Energy Affordability Taskforce (NEAT) to identify, assess and implement measures that will enhance energy affordability for households and businesses, while delivering key renewable commitments and protecting security of supply and economic stability;

— the NEAT has noted a wide array of interventions, including those such as a market's revenue cap and/or solidarity contribution, which in a previous form were based on EU-wide regulations and decisions and will continue to consider all potential interventions and developments in this regard;

— the Government will continue to monitor and assess the situation in relation to energy costs;

— the NEAT continues to work intensively on an Energy Affordability Action Plan to be submitted to Government in the coming weeks; and

— the Government will also make a range of relevant decisions as part of Budget 2027."

-(Minister of State at the Department of Justice Home Affairs and Migration, Deputy Ardagh)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding a windfall tax on the excess profits of energy companies. On Tuesday, 29 September 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the motion be agreed to", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 76; Níl, 66; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon

Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
Brophy, Colm.	Buckley, Pat.	
Browne, James.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butterly, Paula.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Cullinane, David.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cummins, Jen.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Daly, Pa.	
Calleary, Dara.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Chambers, Jack.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Clendennen, John.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Connolly, John.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Cooney, Joe.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Currie, Emer.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Daly, Martin.	Gould, Thomas.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Graves, Ann.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Healy, Seamus.	
Fleming, Sean.	Hearne, Rory.	
Foley, Norma.	Kelly, Alan.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Geoghegan, James.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Grealish, Noel.	Lawless, Paul.	
Heneghan, Barry.	Lawlor, George.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Keogh, Keira.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Kyne, Seán.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Lahart, John.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Lawless, James.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lowry, Michael.	Mythen, Johnny.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Nash, Ged.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McCormack, Tony.	Nolan, Carol.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	

McGrath, Séamus.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
Moynihan, Michael.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Moynihan, Shane.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Murphy, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Neville, Joe.	Quaide, Liam.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Connor, James.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	Ward, Mark.	
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
Ó Fearghail, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Jennifer Whitmore and Sinéad Gibney.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: : "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to"

The Dáil divided: Tá, 76; Níl, 66; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
Brophy, Colm.	Buckley, Pat.	
Browne, James.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butterly, Paula.	Coppinger, Ruth.	

Buttimer, Jerry.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Cullinane, David.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cummins, Jen.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Daly, Pa.	
Calleary, Dara.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Chambers, Jack.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Clendennen, John.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Connolly, John.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Cooney, Joe.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Currie, Emer.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Daly, Martin.	Gould, Thomas.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Graves, Ann.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Healy, Seamus.	
Fleming, Sean.	Hearne, Rory.	
Foley, Norma.	Kelly, Alan.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Geoghegan, James.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Grealish, Noel.	Lawless, Paul.	
Heneghan, Barry.	Lawlor, George.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Keogh, Keira.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Kyne, Seán.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Lahart, John.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Lawless, James.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lowry, Michael.	Mythen, Johnny.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Nash, Ged.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McCormack, Tony.	Nolan, Carol.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
Moynihan, Michael.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Moynihan, Shane.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Murphy, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Neville, Joe.	Quaide, Liam.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Rice, Pádraig.	

O'Connor, James.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	Ward, Mark.	
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
Ó Feargháil, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Jennifer Whitmore and Sinéad Gibney.

Question declared carried.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 7.36 p.m. go dtí 8.47 a.m., Déardaoin, an 1 Deireadh Fómhair 2026.

The Dáil adjourned at 7.36 p.m. until 8.47 a.m. on Thursday, 1 October 2026.