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DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 21 Deireadh Fómhair 2026

Wednesday, 21 October 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 Erin McGreehan - To discuss the national cancer control programme's proposed national radioligand therapy plan.

Deputy Duncan Smith - To discuss the current roadworks and traffic congestion issues in Swords.

Deputy Cathal Crowe - To discuss an application made by a school in County Clare to become a Gaelscoil.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne - To discuss measures to tackle the rate of youth unemployment.

Deputy Seán Kyne - To discuss funding for increased capacity on Galway commuter bus routes.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly - To discuss staffing issues at Naas General Hospital.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness - To discuss primary care in Waterford.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly - To discuss the need for EV charging infrastructure to be located in developments.

Deputy Donna McGettigan - To discuss calls for women to be told their breast density and for further tests to be made available.

Deputy Michael Cahill - To discuss contamination of the Ballyheigue public water supply in County Kerry.

Deputy Ryan O'Meara - To discuss the need for a full review of trespass laws in rural Ireland.

Deputy Jen Cummins - To discuss the improvements needed for diagnosis of ADHD.

Deputy Thomas Gould - To discuss the opening of the dementia unit in Heather House and the closure of the dementia unit in Sarsfield Court.

Deputies Michael Murphy and Mattie McGrath - To discuss the need to strengthen Uisce Éireann's accountability to Dáil Éireann.

Deputies Tom Brabazon, Barry Heneghan, Cian O'Callaghan and Naoise Ó Muirí - To discuss the ongoing delays with the new school building project at Gaelcholáiste Reachrann.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman - To discuss the case of a student from Gaza who has had his visa for study in Ireland refused.

The matters raised by Deputies Cathal Crowe, Erin McGreehan, Aidan Farrelly, Donna McGettigan and Ryan O'Meara have been selected for discussion.

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Education Policy

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Moynihan, very much for taking this Topical Issue matter this morning. I want to raise a very important issue, which relates to rural education and the preservation of the all-important Irish language in my constituency of Clare. This morning I want to highlight a community initiative led by St. Patrick's National School in the village of O'Callaghan's Mills in east Clare. Like far too many of our fine national schools, St. Patrick's National School has seen a heavy change in local demographics. In recent years the number of children enrolling has plummeted. However, rather than accepting a very slow decline of the school and its enrolment numbers, the relatively newly appointed principal, Gráinne Conlon, along with the board of management and the local community, has refused to let the school fade into the background. Instead, the school has come forward with a visionary and very practical solution, namely, the reopening of the school as a Gaelscoil in September 2027.

There is a massive geographical gap in our educational infrastructure as there is no Gaelscoil whatsoever in the entire east Clare region. The Minister of State has visited Gaelscoil Mhíchíl Cíosóg, a fine school in Ennis led by Dónal Ó hAiniféin. This is a long way out the road for those living in east Clare who would like to have their children educated through the medium of Irish. They have to go much further afield. St. Patrick's National School in O'Callaghan's Mills proposes to fix this. Under its proposal, the school would begin an eight-year transition phase starting in September 2027, when it would welcome a new intake of junior infants who would be in senior infants the following year and then first class the year after that. Within an eight-year period, it would become a scoil lán-Ghaeilge.

I have been to visit the school and I have spoken to Gráinne Conlon and her staff. I am fully supportive of their campaign and I know it enjoys widespread political backing from other TDs and colleagues in Clare as well as councillors. It has community and political backing. We are looking for the full backing of the Minister of State as well. As I have said, the campaign enjoys widespread support. A recent local survey of the community confirmed that more than

100 people in the school catchment area are fully in favour of an Irish-medium school in their locality. Furthermore, a crucial step was achieved recently when Bishop Fintan Monahan of the Killaloe diocese formally gave his permission to explore the transition. There is backing from parents, politicians, the parish, the board, language advocates and the bishop.

The benefits of this transition are clear. It would revitalise a vital rural community hub. Crucially, a return to a three-classroom model would allow the school to access additional special education and learning support hours that are currently restricted due to the school having very low numbers. In a debate in the Chamber yesterday, the Taoiseach acknowledged to me that using an existing undercapacity school structure to meet a glaring and unfulfilled demand for Irish-medium education makes absolute financial and social sense. It would save the State from building a brand-new school at a time when capital projects are very much to the pin of their collar. It would also protect the future of the rural school, the rural community and the hinterland that surrounds it.

The community has done all of the heavy lifting to date. The school has the vision, there is local demand and it has the patron's blessing. What it now needs is a firm and unequivocal commitment from the Department of education. Will the Minister of State confirm that the Department of education will formally sanction, approve and fully resource St. Patrick's National School in O'Callaghan's Mills, County Clare to successfully open its doors as a Gaelscoil in September 2027?

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Youth (Deputy Michael Moynihan): I thank Deputy Crowe for his question. To give some background, the Department of Education and Youth has been engaging with school communities and school patron bodies throughout the country through the primary school survey, which is the largest of its kind. It is examining the vision for the future of primary school education across the system, including, for example, whether schools want to change patronage or have co-education or single-sex education. The Department has been working throughout the primary school sector on one of the biggest surveys of its kind to see what is the future for schools.

St. Patrick's National School in O'Callaghan's Mills has completed the online expression of interest as part of the survey. It has indicated its interest in changing from teaching through English to teaching through Irish. The Department is very much looking at schools and school communities, and at the renewed interest in the Irish language throughout school sectors, particularly at primary and post-primary levels. The school has engaged very thoroughly in reaching out to its board and then to its patron and to its community.

As the Deputy said in his contribution, it has done much of the heavy lifting. It has gone about examining the possibility of teaching through the medium of Irish in a very earnest and serious way. It has also seen the level of interest from the wider community, as I understand it, and not just from within O'Callaghan's Mills. This is currently being evaluated by the Department. I assure the Deputy that we are taking each and every application extremely seriously. We are also looking at schools such as St. Patrick's National School to see the vision they have outlined in their documents to the Department. Their proactive approach is very much in keeping with what the Department is seeking.

We are currently evaluating all the applications received. I assure the Deputy that we will give very serious consideration to the points he has made this morning and has consistently

made to me regarding St. Patrick's National School in O'Callaghan's Mills, not only during this discussion on the floor of the Dáil this morning but throughout our other discussions. I compliment the school community, the school leadership and the wider community on their engagement, the way they have presented their papers and their work to ensure they have engaged thoroughly with the Department. I understand that my Department is engaging with the school regularly, but decisions in that regard will be taken in due course.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I sincerely thank the Minister of State for his response. It is encouraging. The Department is very aware of this issue. Indeed, it is in almost daily contact with the principal, Gráinne Conlon.

It is important to say a few things about the school itself. Ms Conlon has taught in Irish-medium schools. I think she has taught in three Gaelscoileanna elsewhere in the county. A deputy principal was hired recently, and his appointment was very much geared around the fact that this school could be a Gaelscoil in September 2027. The skill set is on site. The Minister of State's constituency of Cork North-West and my constituency of Clare are very similar in demographics, although the geography might be somewhat different. I have seen, as I am sure the Minister of State has, far too many of these schools go into decline. While St. Patrick's National School is some way off having to close, and I do not think anyone is saying that is on the cards, Ms Conlon and the board of management are very much realists. They are saying they will not let the school decline any further.

There is an unmet demand for a Gaelscoil in the whole area of east Clare. A huge swathe of the county, more than half of it, has no Gaelscoil, and this school is ready to meet that demand. Time is of the essence. I accept and appreciate that there has been a huge level of engagement and back-and-forth contact with the Department. That is acknowledged. If this school is to open as a Gaelscoil in September 2027, it realistically needs to know this side of Christmas. It must do everything from ordering books and updating school plans to holding open nights. Crucially, parents in the catchment area, and we are not just talking about the village itself but an area extending perhaps 10 or 12 miles beyond it, need to be able to make informed decisions. As I said, the proposal, of course, has the backing of the principal and deputy principal. The board, the parents, the community, the bishop, the patron and the politicians are also on board.

There is overwhelming demand for this Gaelscoil. I hope we will get good news in the coming weeks. I do not think we can wait until the spring for an answer. Will the Department appoint a dedicated liaison officer? Several people are dealing with the principal, but she needs one constant point of contact until, hopefully, the proposal is approved. Does the Minister of State have any definitive timelines?

Deputy Michael Moynihan: As the Cathaoirleach Gníomhach will agree, our constituencies are alike. That is why I spent so many happy times in Clare during August.

Returning to the points raised, we have engaged very thoroughly. There is a dedicated and effective team within the Department of education looking at the applications from schools that want to change from English-medium to Irish-medium education.

In the programme for Government and the policy announced in November 2025, we committed to ensuring that we have Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí across the country. We have seen a tremendous uptake and interest in learning through Irish, and we have to compliment that interest across the country. The team within the Department is very thorough. I have engaged closely with it on this and other issues, and it is working closely with the schools concerned. I know it has been engaging with school communities to provide definitive information to schools that would be opening in September 2027.

I do not want to give the Deputy a definitive timeline on the floor of the Dáil this morning. I take what the Deputy has said earnestly and seriously, and I will relay it to the Department. I have no doubt that the relevant section in the Department is working closely with St. Patrick's National School in O'Callaghan's Mills. It is important as well that there is an early lead-in time. The school has put up its hand. It has shown that it has public representatives, the patron, the school community and the wider community on board. Those are hugely important building blocks for moving forward.

I will take back what the Deputy has said. Expanding Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí across the country is an important part of the programme for Government and the policy in the Department. We will continue to liaise with the school in O'Callaghan's Mills.

Cancer Services

Deputy Erin McGreehan: The Minister of State, Deputy Dillon, is very welcome to the House. When somebody has advanced cancer, being told that another treatment exists brings real hope. Discovering they cannot access it in Ireland brings an entirely different feeling of desperation. That is why I am raising the urgent need for a funded national plan for radioligand therapy, with the infrastructure, staff and access to medicines needed to deliver it.

I acknowledge the progress being made in our cancer services and the commitment to delivering them, but we have to be honest about where the system is falling short. The radioligand therapy advisory group of the national cancer control programme, NCCP, recommended the development of a national plan, yet I understand that this group has not met since March 2025. The responses to my parliamentary questions indicate that this work has not been prioritised by the Department of Health or the office of the chief clinical officer of HIQA during 2025 and 2026. Why has that expert recommendation not been translated into a funded programme of work? I ask this question with real concern. How can we prepare for and deliver the next generation of cancer treatments if the planning needed to deliver them is not being prioritised? We need to know who is responsible, what resources are required and when the national plan will be delivered.

Separately, I was recently informed that the HSE senior leadership team has reached a final decision not to reimburse Pluvicto, a radioligand treatment for certain patients with advanced prostate cancer. I understand that Novartis spent four years seeking reimbursement and, while disappointed, has accepted the decision. It is probable that our patients in Ireland will never gain access to this treatment. Four years is an enormous length of time for patients looking for an advanced treatment, only not to get it now. These are people hoping for another Christmas, another birthday and more time with their families. It would be helpful to have an explanation of why this application failed.

This debate, however, is about more than one drug. It tells us about our wider reimbursement system. Our processes are not equipped to assess and introduce advanced therapies in a timely, fair and sustainable way. The health policy partnership White Paper identified practical work that is required, including national leadership, workforce planning, infrastructure investment, better data collection and co-ordinated access pathways. Those recommendations deserve a focus. We need suitable treatment facilities, diagnostic capacity, radiopharmacy services, radiation protection arrangements and trained specialist teams. We also need access to the medicines themselves. A treatment room without funded treatment will do nothing for patients.

The new national cancer strategy has to address this properly and be ambitious. Radioligand therapy needs to be an explicit commitment, backed by capital investment, recurring funding, workforce targets and delivery dates. Planning services and accessing medicines have to proceed alongside each other. We cannot keep waiting until a treatment arrives before asking whether we have the capacity to deliver it. For patients in Louth and throughout the country, access must depend on a clinical need and be supported by clear referral pathways.

I hope the Minister of State can bring back this issue to the Minister for Health to seek a commitment to reconvene the radioligand therapy advisory group of the NCCP, to progress a funded national plan concerning how the Department and the HSE are planning to keep pace with science, and to request that they also start looking at how advanced therapies are being denied to our loved ones who have cancer.

We have made real progress in cancer care. Our responsibility is now to ensure that treatments will reach patients when they still have time to benefit from them.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Alan Dillon): I thank Deputy McGreehan for raising this important issue in regard to radioligand therapy provision here in Ireland. I am taking this matter on behalf of the Minister for Health, Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill.

I assure the Deputy that her steadfast advocacy in respect of the provision of treatment services for cancer patients is appreciated by all. I also assure her that the Government is committed to providing timely access to new and innovative medicines to all patients, including those with cancer, alongside the planned development of the infrastructure required to safely deliver such therapies.

In 2024, St. Vincent's University Hospital in Dublin was designated the initial site in Ireland for the delivery of radioligand therapy. In 2025, that site received European certification as a centre of excellence in theranostics. This certification is a testament to the exceptional work being done in this area, serving to reinforce the growing importance of radioligand therapy in Ireland and underscoring the Government's efforts to advance progress in this important field.

To build upon this progress, the HSE's NCCP has engaged with cancer centres and nuclear medicine specialists and established the radioligand therapy advisory group to support consideration of service requirements. Established in 2025, the group is chaired by the national director of the NCCP, and its membership is drawn from across the health spectrum, including representatives from the NCCP, consultant clinicians, radiation oncologists and specialists.

The purpose of the group is to consider, on the basis of the need identified, plans for the future development of radioligand therapy services, including recommended norms in relation to service provision, planning and staffing considerations for facilities. In its initial stages, membership of this group is expected to last for a period of three years, within which the group will meet to consider approaches that may be taken for the furtherance of planning necessary to best advance this treatment.

There are numerous interdependencies to be considered. The HSE has advised that challenges persist in the delivery of radioligand therapy in Ireland, particularly in terms of infrastructure and capacity. As with any complex area of service delivery, a measured and well-considered approach to planning is paramount. It is towards the progression of this objective that the NCCP's radioligand therapy advisory group is currently engaged, and work remains ongoing in this regard.

I accept and understand the concerns the Deputy raised in her opening statement regarding the pace and prioritisation, and I will certainly ensure that those concerns are conveyed to the Minister and that the Department continues to work on making progress on the Government's commitments. The Government has demonstrated its appetite to deliver innovative cancer treatments through significant investments in recent years in regard to medicines. Supporting the development of radioligand therapy is also an important priority.

Deputy Erin McGreehan: I thank the Minister of State for that response. My question was one that I would like to be conveyed to the Minister. The NCCP radioligand therapy advisory group recommended a national plan. It has not met since March 2025. It is now October, nearly November, 2026. It is going to be stood down. It is going to be in existence for only three years. If its members are not meeting, they are not working. The Department of Health has not implemented the group's current asks. Of course, it is welcome that since 2024 St. Vincent's University Hospital has been a centre of excellence for theranostics. However, one centre is not enough. *The Lancet* states that the patient pool across Europe could rise from the current 11,000 to 13,000 people a year to nearly 200,000 a year across Europe. We, through a lack of investment in infrastructure, a lack of planning and a lack of a robust reimbursement scheme, are going to fail future patients. We need our next national cancer strategy to be very ambitious and keep pace with science, and we need to ensure it is absolutely fully funded, not only on the infrastructural, clinical and diagnostic sides but also on the treatment side.

Deputy Alan Dillon: I acknowledge Deputy McGreehan's continued advocacy on this issue on behalf of all the cancer patients who are seeking access to the latest treatment options. I said in my opening remarks that her persistent voice in this area is very welcome. I recognise the importance of the concerns she has raised in regard to the ongoing engagement of the advisory group and the fact that it has not met since last year. The issue very much surrounds the clinical capacity, the infrastructure and the evidence base necessary to support a safe and sustainable national service. Everyone in this House shares the same objective, which is that we want Irish patients to receive timely access to innovative cancer treatments and get the best possible outcomes. That is really the point the Deputy is raising here today. It is clear that the delivery of these services involves significant considerations. I hope that this work will advance in the next national cancer programme and that we will have specialist staff, capacity, long-term service planning and, indeed, the infrastructure to deliver the services. I will ensure

that the Deputy's concerns, which are understandable and deserve to be heard, are brought back to the Minister for Health for further consideration.

Hospital Staff

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I want to speak to the Minister of State, Deputy Dillon, about some emerging issues in Naas General Hospital. I have spoken to the Minister of State previously about the context of County Kildare and the population growth in the county since the early 1990s, when it had a population of approximately 100,000 people. Now we are in a situation where we have 250,000 people and, if we keep growing at the rate at which we have done for the next 20 years or so, we will have a population of half a million by 2050. I say that to set the scene because, as we know, such a significant population increase places significant pressure on our critical infrastructure. Understandably, people want to live in County Kildare. Nowhere is the pressure more acute than at Naas General Hospital right now.

Last week, we were invited to a meeting by the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation which was attended by nurses and consultants who spoke really honestly about the reality of working in Naas General Hospital right now. Their experience and stories about what they are facing are very concerning. They spoke about significant increases in presentations at the accident and emergency department without any increase in the numbers of nurses and consultants. We also heard from the head of the physiotherapy department, who said patients face a four-and-a-half-year wait from referral to engagement when it comes to physiotherapy. That essentially means many people will never receive a service.

We also heard from Lakeview, which is one of the busiest psychiatric and mental health services in the country. It is desperately underfunded. We heard a comparison made with a Border region that has one third of the population of the HSE catchment area in which Lakeview is situated, but receives four times the mental health services funding, specifically for acute care and inpatient care, which are very important areas of care.

My concern arises from the fact that we still have not met the 2024 allocation of staff. Sanctioned posts have not been filled despite numerous attempts by those responsible. We now find ourselves in a position where the management team and the HSE cannot hire. Responsibility comes back to the Department of Health to sanction posts in Naas General Hospital. However, two weeks ago at the public accounts committee, of which I am a member, the same Department's officials told me after questioning that it needs to find a reduction of €100 million in its staffing bill this year alone. We have a situation where we simply do not have adequate or safe staffing levels in Naas General Hospital to the point where we see the real prospect of bed closures, while the Department says it needs to reduce its human resources bill by €100 million. How do we get around this? We do not need appeasement. Kildare needs proper representation and to be catered for. We are continuously being forgotten when it comes to health services, school places and public transport. We need, at the least, a commitment that Department officials will travel to Naas hospital to meet staff members and patients in order to understand that this is not simply a matter of being over budget but, rather, under-resourced.

Deputy Alan Dillon: I thank the Deputy for raising this Topical Issue, which I am taking on behalf of the Minister for Health, Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill. As he outlined, Naas

General Hospital plays a vital role in providing acute hospital services to the people of Kildare, west Wicklow and the surrounding areas. The Government recognises the importance of ensuring the hospital has the staff, resources and capacity needed to provide safe, high-quality care for a growing population. That commitment is reflected in sustained investment. The hospital's budget for 2026 is €131 million, an increase of almost 60% since 2022. Its workforce has grown by almost 42% since January 2020, with a further 52 whole-time equivalent staff added between December 2025 and August 2026. Staffing growth at Naas has exceeded growth across acute hospital services nationally over both periods. Alongside this investment, inpatient bed capacity has increased. However, growth in funding and staff numbers is only part of the picture. Workforce planning must also have the right mix of staff and skills available to meet patient needs, cover absences and support services as demand changes.

Recruitment is continuing across a range of staff disciplines at Naas. The wider HSE approach includes supporting healthcare graduates into employment, strengthening domestic and international recruitment and encouraging healthcare professionals working abroad to return home through project home. The development of a national staff bank is also being progressed to provide greater flexibility and reduce reliance on agency staffing.

Retention is equally important. Staff need predictable working arrangements and a working environment that supports them to remain in the service. At Naas, a new 22-week rota for emergency department non-consultant hospital doctors provides greater certainty about work schedules and reduces the need for short-notice roster changes. This is a practical example of how workforce planning can support both staff and service delivery.

There has also been progress under the framework for safe nurse staffing and skill mix. The latest information provided confirms that baseline staffing under the framework has been achieved across inpatient wards and in the emergency department. The supporting TrendCare system has been fully operational at Naas since July, helping the hospital assess nursing requirements against patients' care needs in real time.

Alongside this progress, reducing reliance on agency staffing must remain a clear priority. The latest nursing information confirms that agency staff and overtime hours continue to cover permanent vacancies and temporary absences. Agency staff play an important role in maintaining services, but ongoing staffing needs should increasingly be met through direct employment. Targeted recruitment, conversion of appropriate agency roles to direct employment and better rostering should support that transition, while protecting patient safety and continuity of care.

Workforce planning is also about making the best use of the staff and capacity already available. Naas has demonstrated the benefits of this approach as an early adopter of the outpatient improvement toolkit. By June this year, that work had added more than 4,000 new outpatient appointments since 2025 through to 2026. Building on this progress, better scheduling and co-ordination of staffing, outpatient clinics, theatre sessions and diagnostics can help more patients receive timely care and ensure that investment delivers the greatest outcome.

The Department of Health and the HSE will continue to work with hospital management to keep workforce and resourcing requirements under review. The objective is to ensure that

investment at Naas supports staff in delivering safe, timely and high-quality care to the communities and the hospital itself.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I thank the Minister of State for that reply on the behalf of the Minister and the Department. For the record, the piece of the reply I will draw attention to is the figure of 52 additional staff in Naas General Hospital between December 2025 and August 2026. Of those 52, only five are nurses. The Minister of State told us that we had 52 additional staff members in Naas but he provided no detailed breakdown as to who they are. We do not know whether they are healthcare workers or administrative staff. What we know, however, is that five of them are nurses. Equally, we know that we also lost five nurses between July and August of this year, so we are at a break-even point. That manifests itself when people present to the accident and emergency department, wait for hours and watch on as overburdened staff try to fight fires in every corner of the room. I have witnessed it first hand. I commend, as everyone in this House does, including the Minister of State, their Trojan commitment. I looked in people's eyes last week – I do not try to overstate this – and saw the despair of professionals at risk of burnout and walking away from a career they love simply because it is unsustainable, given that they leave with worry or the on-call system places even greater demands on them.

I do not get any reassurance from the reply that there are not any problems in this regard and that is a concern. It is something we will all continue to raise. We all know that, right now, negotiations are under way to try to stave off the prospect of bed closures in Naas. With a population of 250,000, we have to avoid that. I ask the Minister of State to convey the sincerity by which we tried to raise this Topical Issue with the Minister and the Department to see if we can avoid that situation.

Deputy Alan Dillon: I thank the Deputy for his contribution and for highlighting the challenges facing staff and patients in Naas General Hospital. We are all in agreement that healthcare workers are the backbone of our health service. Every doctor, nurse, healthcare professional and support staff member who comes to work every day plays a critical role in delivering care to patients. I know the Deputy has delivered that with sincerity. We, as a Government, recognise that recruitment and retention remain significant challenges not just in Naas, but across the healthcare service in Ireland and internationally. That is why considerable investment has been made in staffing, workforce growth and hospital resources over recent years. Increasing staff numbers alone is not enough. We also need to retain experienced staff, as the Deputy said, improve workforce planning, provide more predictable workforce arrangements and reduce our reliance on temporary staff.

The issues the Deputy raised today regarding recruitment, retention and workforce pressures in Naas are important. They deserve continued attention. As I said earlier, I will bring these points back to the Minister. I will ensure the concerns the Deputy has expressed this morning are conveyed and that the Department of Health and the HSE continue to keep staffing requirements under review so that patients in Naas, Kildare and across the country receive safe and timely care.

Everyone in this House will agree that we need a strong hospital service and better outcomes for patients and communities. We are very much dependent on the staff to deliver that.

Cancer Services

Deputy Donna McGettigan: I want to raise the call for women to be told their breast density before they are told they have cancer. Almost half of all women have dense breasts and it is important to note that dense breasts are normal. Dense breast tissue is made up of glands and fibrous tissue. However, on a mammogram, cancer shows up as white but so too does breast density. Looking for a cancerous tumour in a dense breast is like looking for a ball of cotton in a snow storm. While having dense breasts does not mean one will automatically have cancer, it does carry an increased risk of developing breast cancer. Having high breast density can mask cancer and the denser the tissue, the whiter the mammogram.

High breast density cannot be detected by a physical examination. It is identified solely through medical imaging. In Ireland, breast density is not currently recorded during BreastCheck screening mammograms. In the words of Laurna, "Breast density isn't just words". It is information about a woman's body that belongs to her. It is a question of ethics and personal autonomy and knowing one's breast density matters. It is critical information that will inform shared consent and shared decision-making and could help guard against the harmful effects of a potentially delayed diagnosis of breast cancer. Most diagnostic and hospital screening mammogram facilities use 3D Tomosynthesis equipment that gives a breast density reading. There is no reason not to pass this information on to women.

We heard from several women at a presentation in the audiovisual room recently who had all been diagnosed with breast cancer and all of them said that they had never been told their breast density and the condition may have prevented earlier diagnosis. In fact, we heard from one woman who knew her breast density and although she got a clear mammogram result four months earlier, she took the decision to investigate further and discovered that she had a stage one invasive lobular carcinoma. Evan was lucky and after surgery she was in the clear, with no evidence of the disease. She said that if she had not known that she had dense breasts, she would have not gone for further tests and would, therefore, not have known that she had breast cancer. Many women are not so lucky. Lobular breast cancer is the second most common subtype of breast cancer, accounting for 15% of all breast cancers annually. Treating advanced breast cancer requires significantly more intensive, invasive and costly medical interventions. As Laurna put it, "Breast density isn't just words". It affects husbands, partners, children and the wider family. The human cost is enormous. The financial costs of being out of work, the costs to the State of extensive surgeries and treatments and the mental health costs are all avoidable. Countries like the USA, Canada, France and Austria inform women of their breast density. Margaret asked why the HSE and the Government are denying women this basic information about their bodies. These women have asked that the Government would stop using mixed messages and stop using women's anxiety as a reason to withhold this clinically relevant information. They said that this is playing with women's lives. They have a petition with over 10,000 signatures, so this is not a small group. Like myself, a lot of women have never heard of dense breasts. I first heard about it only last year. The fact is that when many women first hear about it, usually it is when they are being told that they have cancer. Then they have to go through extensive treatment or for some, like Hannah, stage four cancer, with no good result at the end.

Deputy Alan Dillon: I thank the Deputy for the opportunity to discuss the important matter of breast density notification. I am taking this issue on behalf of the Minister for Health, Deputy Carroll MacNeill. Enhancing Ireland's population screening programmes is a priority for the Minister. These programmes are a vital component of our health services.

Dense breast tissue is common. Around half of all women have dense breasts and it is a normal variation in breast tissue. Breast density is one of several factors that can influence breast cancer risk. It is very important to say, however, that having dense breasts does not mean someone will develop breast cancer. High levels of breast density can make mammograms more difficult to interpret in some women. However, breast density alone does not automatically mean that further imaging is required. Decisions about additional imaging are made on an individual basis by the clinical team as part of a woman's assessment and diagnosis.

BreastCheck mammograms remain the best screening test available for population breast screening for women aged between 50 and 69. It can save lives by finding many cancers early, often before symptoms develop. It is important to know that mammography detects the majority of breast cancers, including in women with dense breasts. Consideration of any changes to Ireland's screening programmes is facilitated through established evidence-driven protocols. The national screening advisory committee, NSAC, is the expert group that advises on any proposed changes to Ireland's screening programmes. At the request of the committee, the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, has commenced a health technology assessment, HTA, to consider proposals for the expansion of the BreastCheck programme. This review comprises three distinct components. One is the proposed extension of the age range eligibility to those aged between 45 and 49. Another is the extension of age range to those aged from 70 to 74. The third element is the potential introduction of a standardised breast density notification.

HTAs facilitate the assessment of relevant evidence on the effects and consequences of healthcare technologies or programmes. They seek to guide decisions regarding the appropriate use of technology and efficient allocation of resources. They involve a multidisciplinary assessment of clinical, economic, ethical, legal and societal perspectives that may be impacted by the introduction of a new technology or programme. HTAs are, by their nature, time intensive and rigorous processes that must be afforded the necessary time to complete. This is particularly relevant in the context of the BreastCheck HTA, which, as I said, is considering three distinct areas, including the potential reporting of breast density. It is expected that the final HIQA HTA report on all three elements will be submitted to the NSAC before the end of 2027. Once received, the committee will consider the findings and make a recommendation to the Minister for Health.

The introduction or expansion of any new screening service requires careful consideration, particularly when we are considering all the clinical, ethical, societal, legal and economic perspectives. The Minister wishes to develop services that are clinically effective and have positive health outcomes. This is particularly relevant in the context of significant differences in international clinical opinion on the incorporation of breast density notification into screening. This emphasises the need for an evidence-led approach to ensure that any decision serves the best interests of Irish women.

Deputy Donna McGettigan: I thank the Minister of State for answering this question on behalf of the Minister for Health. The departmental response states that BreastCheck mammography remains the best screening option because it detects the majority of breast cancers, including in women with dense breasts. However, what the women who presented to us are saying is that in some cases, the cancer has grown to a point where it takes extensive treatment or, for some, it is too late for treatment. Siobhán told us that if she had known she had dense breasts, her 7 cm tumour would have been found earlier because she would have insisted on having other forms of breast checks, as she would have known that her dense breasts could be masking cancer, which it was. She could have had a lumpectomy and avoided a mastectomy. She could have had avoided chemotherapy and had the tumour detected earlier so that it would not have spread to her auxiliary nodes.

In some cases, BreastCheck clinics use older 2D mammogram equipment but software packages are available that can be used to upgrade these older units. The fact that women are not being told their breast density is nothing short of inequality for women. We are not telling them exactly what is happening with their bodies. I have written to the Minister asking for a meeting with these women who have dense breasts and are suffering with breast cancer.

These women will never be the same after a breast cancer diagnosis, especially a delayed diagnosis. Some women will be told too late about their cancer diagnosis and will have to struggle with stage four cancer. They have been on this campaign for ten years and unfortunately some of them are no longer with us. This is going on a long time and it is not just about the physical scars for some. They will have mental scars from this. While I welcome the age range eligibility and the potential report on breast density, in terms of a woman's right to have the information on her body, the potential should be turned into the reality of telling women of their breast density.

Deputy Alan Dillon: I thank the Deputy for raising her concerns and those of many of the women, families and advocacy groups she mentioned with regard to this issue. We share those concerns. They are being taken seriously by Government. The discussion about breast density notification is important because it relates directly to women's confidence in the screening programme and access to information about their health. At the same time, the Minister for Health has a responsibility to ensure that any changes to the national screening programme are informed by robust clinical evidence and supported by the appropriate clinical pathways. The Deputy will be aware that the health technology assessment under way will examine the potential introduction of a standardised breast density notification as part of the wider review of the BreastCheck programme due to be reported late next year. I acknowledge many women want swifter progress and I understand that from the Deputy's perspective. However, as a Government we are ensuring that we can continue to get the best possible outcomes for women and ensure that women have confidence in the care they receive. There is a timing issue and maybe that is what we differ on, but the objective is aligned, which is that Irish women receive the highest standard of screening information and care possible. That is the effort the Minister and her Department are working towards. I will take back the concerns raised by the Deputy.

Legislative Measures

Deputy Ryan O'Meara: I welcome the opportunity to raise an important issue causing genuine fear and anxiety across the rural communities I represent in north Tipperary and north-west Kilkenny. On Monday morning, I attended a meeting in Ballingarry, north Tipperary, where approximately 30 farmers met me to discuss trespass on their land and property. What I mean by this are repeated incidents of people entering farmland without permission, often at night, accompanied by lurcher dogs and using lamps or thermal scopes. The area I am talking about is Ballingarry, Carrig Riverstown, Aglish and those parts of lower Ormond north of Borrisokane and south of Birr and Portumna. That is to give a geographic idea.

This area is just one example of many across rural Ireland that are experiencing these trespass issues and the intimidation that comes with them. Here are some examples to let the House know what is happening in this area. One farmer told me that the same individuals had returned to his land every week for five consecutive weeks. Another described a group whose lurcher caught a hare. The individual killed the hare in front of the farmer, then threatened the farmer and damaged fencing on his land. A couple of weeks ago, another farmer was threatened with a metal bar by an individual trespassing on his land. Other described electrical fencing being cut, which is not unusual when this stuff happens, livestock escaping onto roads and in one instance an animal being hit by a car.

These are not simply disputes about access to land. They are matters of community safety, personal security and animal welfare. People in rural Ireland deserve to feel safe in their own homes and on their own land. Farmers should not have to feel intimidation, threats, repeated trespassing or deliberate damage to their property or goods by people on their land who do not have permission to be there. I want to be clear that this is not a criticism of local gardaí. I recognise the challenges with response times, particularly in rural Ireland. However, farmers have raised concerns about the availability of nearby stations, response times to this rural area, difficulties contacting the local Garda stations and the arrangements of crossing district boundaries to respond to calls.

That brings me to the wider concern, which is the amalgamation of the Tipperary and Clare Garda divisions. I believe it was a huge mistake. I opposed it at the time and I continue to oppose it. We are talking about a Garda division that goes from the west coast of Clare - the Atlantic Ocean - down to Carrick-on-Suir in south Tipperary. We should have two separate divisions for the two different counties. Rural communities need visible policing and confidence that assistance can reach them when they need it. I want the Minister for justice to examine whether the current structure is delivering that, particularly for communities that feel isolated from their main Garda station. Nenagh is the main station for the area I am talking about in Ballingarry, but it is quite a distance away. Borrisokane and Roscrea are two other stations in the general locality but they are not open all the time and therefore the response time is a major issue. We also need to address animal welfare issues.

However, I want to distinguish clearly between lawful and legitimate conservation activities, and people accessing land with permission to do so, from those who are continually and illegally accessing farmers' land leaving the farmers feeling threatened and unsafe with threats of violence and farmers not knowing what to do and how to deal with this situation. They are afraid that if they tackle trespassers on their land that there will be repercussions for them as well.

Deputy Alan Dillon: I thank the Deputy for raising this serious matter that deserves the attention of the Dáil. Everyone has the right to feel safe in their local communities. He referred to a meeting in Ballingarry. Acts that undermine people's safety should not be tolerated. Government recognises that community safety is not just about policing but about building communities that are stronger and more resilient. That involves communities themselves building safe and secure communities, contributing to needs across government. Our whole approach to community safety is based on that principle. The National Rural Safety Forum is a perfect example of this approach as its membership consists of Departments, State agencies, social enterprises and representative organisations.

The forum is co-chaired by the IFA and An Garda Síochána and provides a space for organisations to bring forward issues that can be addressed in a more collaborative manner. Working in conjunction with the forum, the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration developed the rural safety plan up to 2027. The second revision of this plan aims to promote safety in rural communities. That plan was launched at the National Ploughing Championships last year along with the deputy president of the IFA and assistant Garda commissioner for community engagement.

Relevant stakeholders had a presence at this year's championship and engaged with tens of thousands of members of the public in relation to the plan and crime in rural areas. Members of the National Rural Safety Forum reflected on the needs of the people they serve and represent and identified four priority areas for the plan to address. This follows an analysis of the impact of previous rural safety plans and consultation with their stakeholders. These priority areas, which form the four pillars of the plan, are community safety and engagement, property crime, road safety and animal welfare crime. To make improvements in these areas, the member organisations have committed to 18 overarching actions. These include individual actions or tackling home burglaries and trespassing on private property.

10 o'clock

One of the main areas of tackling these issues is Operation Thor, An Garda Síochána's national anti-burglary initiative which has seen a strong focus on rural areas. Following its introduction, recorded residential burglaries fell from 12,600 in the 2015 winter phase to fewer than 2,600 in the same period of 2026.

In respect of the legal position of trespassing itself, as the Deputy will be aware, there is robust legislation in place. Therefore, there are no plans to change the law in this regard. However, it is important that we address the safety, the security and the rights of individuals to enjoy their farm and their home and business without fear of intimidation. The issues Deputy O'Meara has raised deserve greater attention and focus.

Deputy Ryan O'Meara: I thank the Minister of State for his response. To be very straight, the dogs on the street know what these groups are doing when they go onto farmers' land with their lurchers, with their lamps and, in some cases, with their thermal scoping. They should not be on the land to begin with. They are not welcome there. They are repeatedly told that. They do not heed the farmers and indeed it appears the local gardaí when they are told to stay away but we know what they are doing there. They are scoping the land to see what can be robbed. That is what farmers tell me time and again. There are so many rural TDs in this House. The Minister of State himself is one. We all know what they are up to.

I do not accept the trespass laws are adequate in this country. If they were and if we had the Garda response times, the farmers in my constituency and rural people in general would feel safe. They would feel protected. I am not trying to be a fearmonger here but this is real. It is palpable. It was palpable when 30 farmers, at 10 a.m. on a fine Monday morning, decided that instead of going out and doing a bit of work - they had already been out that morning working - they would come into a hall and talk to me about these issues because of how concerned they are.

What I want to see is the Minister for justice engaging with the Garda Commissioner in relation to rural policing, particularly in this area, which is very isolated - the Ballingarry, Carrig, Riverstown, Eglish and general Lower Ormond area, from the main station in Nenagh. We are struggling to get resources for these people. We need to look at changing the divisional structure that was put in place, where Tipperary and Clare were amalgamated, but we also need a full review of the trespass laws. We need greater protections for our farmers and rural people from these people who are blatantly trespassing, and we know why. We also need greater penalties to deter them from doing so. The farmers tell me that those gangs coming onto their land - we all know where they are coming from - feel untouchable and the law is failing rural people in that regard.

Deputy Alan Dillon: I thank the Deputy for raising this serious matter. I understand the concerns that have been expressed by his constituents, by rural communities, farming organisations and landowners regarding trespassing and the impact that is having on their daily lives.

For many people, this issue is not simply around property rights. As I said earlier, rural communities deserve to feel safe and the Government needs to continue to work with An Garda Síochána and representative organisations to support that objective.

I certainly recognise the Deputy's concerns raised today. I had a similar scenario in south Mayo, with many farmers and rural dwellers significantly impacted. As in the Deputy's case, public meetings were held. We need to see a response.

The Deputy has made a number of points regarding the operation of the current legislative framework. It needs to be looked at again. The Minister for justice, Deputy Jim O'Callaghan, and the Commissioner need to review this. We have seen the success of Operation Thor and An Garda Síochána's policing model to deter rural burglaries but we need to look at a targeted approach in regard to this issue alone.

As the Deputy said, with thermal lamps and with lurchers, it is evident what the motives of these individuals are. The concerns raised today are really important and I will convey them back to the Minister for justice and ensure he responds.

Non-Binary and Intersex Recognition Bill 2026: Second Stage [Private Members]

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

Before I introduce the Bill, I welcome to the Gallery a huge number of people who are representing various groups in the LGBTQI community. I welcome Transgender Equality

Network of Ireland, TENI, Belong To, Intersex Ireland, Trans Healthcare Action, ShoutOut and Trans Pride. Apologies, if I have left anyone out. I can come back to it at the end. It gives the Minister an idea of how desperate people in the LGBT+ community are for reform and for change and for him to live up to the promises that his party, Fine Gael and others gave to this community.

My Bill proposes to give legal rights and recognition to non-binary and intersex people in Ireland. They are a small minority but they face extreme invisibility, marginalisation, violence and discrimination in this world. The Bill essentially introduces a third option on the gender recognition certificate in addition to M and F, namely, the option of X or Other. Without legal recognition, a non-binary person is systematically discriminated against in accessing healthcare and legal documents and in their interactions with the State and society in general. For a person born with intersex characteristics, it allows a parent or qualified informant to put an X on a birth certificate, meaning that parents would not be forced to immediately choose between male and female. It gives equality before the law and prevents discrimination on these grounds.

To be clear, in 2015, Ireland broke new ground in allowing self-determination in terms of gender but progress has completely and utterly stalled since then and here we are 11 years later with nothing done. The review set up by the Government at the time recommended that non-binary people would also be allowed to be recognised on the gender recognition certificate.

To give Members an idea of what it means to be non-binary in this society, it refers to any person who identifies outside the binary of male and female. This includes non-binary people but also gender queer people - anyone who sees themselves as being outside the male and female binary. From talking to people, even with something as simple as booking a train ticket, you are immediately asked to put, Mr., Mrs. or Ms, and straightaway, in your life, this affects you and, obviously, your passport and your birth certificate do not reflect who you are.

The census was a missed opportunity in terms of identifying how many people would be non-binary. However, if up to 10% of people are LGBTQI, and more people are identifying, in surveys a third would say that they are non-binary. Globally, it is estimated that 2% of the world population identifies in this way.

What is intersex? Intersex people are those born with innate variations of sex characteristics that vary from the societal or medical understanding of typical female and male bodies. Approximately, one-in-500 infants, for example, is born with ambiguous genitalia or other variations of sex development and there are over 40 different types of intersex characteristics, which I do not have time to go into. However, I want to make it clear that in October 2025 the Government signed up to a Council of Europe directive on intersex equality and I am disgusted to find out today that the Government is opposing this Bill, that it will not agree to what was recommended in the gender recognition review and it will not agree to what it promised at the Council of Europe which was to recognise intersex people and to cut out, in particular, the unwanted and dangerous medical interventions that are being done on babies in the name of enforcing a rigid gender binary.

That has been banned in many countries but it has not been banned in Ireland. One of the reasons for putting forward this Bill is to recognise intersex people and to say that this cannot be enforced medically and pushed onto parents with such dangerous repercussions for people

throughout the rest of their lives. The UN estimates that 1.7% of the world population were born with some intersex traits.

Regarding the context of the Bill, we all know there is pushback going on in society. The programme for Government is wishy-washy, even compared to the one in 2020. However, it does commit very clearly to inclusivity and to LGBT+ recognition. Yet here is the first Bill that has come before the Government almost two years into the Dáil term, and it is going to oppose it. I would be hugely interested to hear why. I think one of the reasons is that it is afraid. I think the pushback by the far right and extreme right worldwide and in this country has made the Government fearful. I do not understand it because this Bill is very basic. It is just recognition of the law for people with regard to State documents and their interventions with the State. One of the things that was committed to was that there would be an opening up of State Departments but we still do not have that. We have it in many other fora, like the colleges and universities, which are very good in that they allow non-binary recognition in the main - certainly most of the big universities. However, in so many other interactions with the State, such as with the Department of Social Protection and so on, the Government has not opened up anything. This Bill is putting it on the Government agenda to do so.

There is also a myth that this is some new fad. Non-binary and intersex people have always existed. Ancient civilisations recognised multigenders, as did many other civilisations from Mesopotamia to Asia. It is in art. It is everywhere. Unfortunately, we have a situation where our State has the Gender Recognition Act, which just allows people to transition from male to female but not to non-binary, and does not recognise intersex people.

I want to give an idea of how Ireland has been called out on the UN stage. We had the great 2015 marriage equality referendum, which was obviously a huge push forward. It was led by a grassroots mass movement and pushed onto the Establishment's agenda. However, Ireland has been called out on the UN stage for its lack of action on this. We are registering zero on these issues. This Bill is a chance for the Government to rectify that.

I want to say how important this is for non-binary and intersex people. An EU survey found that one in ten LGBTQI people had faced violence over the past five years. A report in UCD found a 13% increase in discrimination from 2024 to 2026. There is an era of hostility towards LGBT+ people. One in three intersex people has faced violence in Europe over the past five years. We know that one of the first things Trump did was to enforce this rigid gender binary. It is very important for the far right, and for the maintenance of capitalism right now, not to allow any deviation from gender norms. We are seeing an increase in attacks on LGBT+ people worldwide. We should be fighting back against this, and the Bill is a key part of that.

It is important to refer to the work of Belong To, which deals particularly with young people. After the midterm break next week, Belong To will have Stand Up week in schools. I was in those schools when I was a teacher. All schools will be talking about non-binary people, yet the State does not recognise them. Children and young people in classrooms, and their teachers, will rightly be encouraged to recognise that, yet the State does not. There is a real problem here.

A Belong To survey found that 61% of intersex people reported moderate to severe depression, 60% had self-harmed and 74% had experienced suicidal thoughts. How is that

acceptable in our society? Does the Minister not agree that the State refusing to recognise people is a key contributor to that?

To conclude, I want to comment on some of the issues that have been raised by TENI, which has made this point crystal clear. All of the LGBT+ organisations are supporting this Bill. It is deeply disappointing for them that the Government is confronting this first Bill with outright opposition. This is not a stop, not a commitment to work on the Bill and let it pass at this stage but just outright opposition. No explanation has been sent, by the way, to the movers of the Bill. TENI made the point that progress has stalled. It has been calling for the expansion of the gender recognition process to non-binary people. It has also said that this is causing huge problems, depression and anxiety for many people. I do not have time to outline them but there are many testimonials.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I thank Deputy Coppinger for introducing this Bill and thank the campaigners and organisations who have been forced to fight so hard for their rights to be recognised, including TENI, Intersex Ireland, Trans Healthcare Action, Belong To, Trans and Intersex Pride, Transgress the NGS and ShoutOut.

It is clear that intersex and non-binary recognition has been deliberately ignored by this Government and the previous one. It is eight years since the Government's own review of the Gender Recognition Act recommended legal gender recognition for non-binary people. It is in its own national LGBTQI inclusion strategy. However, nothing has been done and instead, the Government is going to vote against the implementation of its own recommendations later today.

Everybody knows why. It is because the political pendulum has swung to the right since 2018, and Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the right-wing Independents are pandering to that. That is what they are prioritising over the rights and the lives of intersex and non-binary people. We know that across the world, violence, hate crimes and discrimination against LGBTQI people are on the rise. A deliberate strategy of hatred against anyone who is seen as different is being whipped up by the far right, and it is coming right from the top - from Donald Trump and from the big tech bros like Elon Musk. The Government is doing nothing to stop it. Instead of fighting against the tide of hate, it is actually leaning into it. It is going with the flow. That is why legal gender recognition has stalled since 2018, and it is why trans, non-binary, queer and intersex people are increasingly under attack.

A lot of people may have never heard of intersex and may not know what it means. They do not realise that 1.7% of people globally are born with intersex characteristics, which means they are born with chromosomes, hormones or anatomy that differ from what is regarded as typically male or female. That has always happened. It is a medically recognised fact. There are tens of thousands of intersex people living in Ireland right now, a largely invisible minority that has been mistreated by the State and the medical profession, and they have had unnecessary surgeries performed on them without their consent.

This Bill cannot right all of those historical wrongs but it can give hope to intersex adults who wish to be recognised today as non-binary so they can choose to have their gender marked as X on official documents. It will allow parents to make the same decision for their children until they are old enough to know how they want to be recognised, instead of forcing them to be assigned as male or female at birth and potentially causing them lifelong psychological

damage. Belong To has found that 61% of intersex people suffer from depression and half have attempted suicide. This Bill will also allow other non-binary people to have their gender recognised instead of being forced by the State into a box that they do not want to be in and do not fit into.

I got an eloquent email last night from a non-binary person in my constituency that describes their experience of non-recognition. It states:

> For many people, something as simple as filling out a form, booking an appointment, travelling or showing identification is something that they barely think twice about. For me, these everyday situations can be deeply uncomfortable, distressing and humiliating. As a non-binary person, I am constantly forced to identify myself in ways that do not reflect who I am. I am not asking for special treatment. I am asking for the same dignity, respect and recognition that other people are able to take for granted. We deserve to be seen, we deserve to be recognised and we deserve to live our lives without being made to feel ashamed of who we are.

Legal recognition will be the first step in defending non-binary people from the discrimination and hate they face, along with other marginalised groups.

Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Malta, the Netherlands, Canada, Costa Rica, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Chile, Colombia and 22 US states have already done it. Ireland can and should be next. It is ironic that the loudest, most vociferous opposition to this Bill will come from the right, which prides itself on opposing the so-called nanny state. It is hard to imagine a more intrusive and interfering, more nannyish role for the State than policing gender, forcing people who do not fall into a binary category to mark male or female on a passport or birth certificate. Why should the State have any place in policing how we understand ourselves, our identities and our gender? Of course it should not. Insisting that the State continues to police and enforce the gender binary is part of a general assault on individual freedoms and individual rights. It is time to take a stand against it.

Deputy Charles Ward: I thank Deputy Coppinger and her staff for all their work on this very important Bill. Recognising non-binary and intersex people is essential to upholding human rights, equality and dignity for all. At the end of the day, this Bill is about basic human rights. It is about a person's right to live with dignity, respect and recognition. Everyone has the right to have their identity recognised and to participate fully in society without fear of discrimination and exclusion. Acknowledging their experiences affirms that human diversity is a valuable part of a shared humanity. We all experience the world differently. These experiences must be respected and valued for all. Diversity must not only be recognised but celebrated. Diversity enriches our society. It makes communities stronger, more resilient and better equipped to respond to the challenges we face in the world today. Upholding the rights and dignity of non-binary intersex people means creating a society where everyone is free to be themselves, where difference is embraced rather than marginalised, where equality, inclusion and respect are fundamental principles of the world we live in.

Recognising the identities can also significantly improve LGBTI mental health and well-being by fostering a sense of belonging, safety, acceptance and reducing stigma and discrimination. Research has consistently found that mental health difficulties are far more prevalent in the LGBTI community. I will repeat what has been said already about recent

studies because it is important to get this on the record. Being from the LGBTI community, people in Ireland continue to face high levels of self-harm, suicide and increased levels of depression and anxiety. I will give the Minister statistics. Some 27% of people experience severe symptoms of depression, 34% experience severe symptoms of anxiety, 52% experience self-harm, and 64% reported suicidal thoughts. Let that sink in. A total of 26% have made suicidal attempts. These percentages are higher among young LGBTI people. Some 50% of people between the ages of 14 and 18 have experienced severe symptoms of depression, and 66% have experienced severe symptoms of anxiety, while 72% have experienced self-harm.

I am a father and reading these statistics is appalling. Shockingly, the self-harm and suicide percentages are even higher in non-binary people. A total of 75% had self-harmed, 82% reported suicidal thoughts and 39% had attempted suicide. It is an absolutely shocking statistic and the Government is tone deaf to what is going on. It is heartbreaking that so many people have experienced such profound stress. The Government needs to do much better. It needs to recognise people's basic human rights. Every person deserves to feel their life is worth living. Right now, this is not happening in our country. Being accepted and recognised should be a right, not a privilege. There is no doubt that Ireland has made significant progress over the recent decades but far more work needs to be done. We should be ahead. Instead, it feels like we are stuck in 2016. This Bill would go a long way to creating equality for non-binary and intersex people in Ireland. Ultimately, recognising and respecting the non-binary and intersex people is essential to ensuring that everyone in our country enjoys the same fundamental rights, freedoms, and opportunities.

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Dara Calleary): Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis labhairt ar an Non-Binary and Intersex Recognition Bill 2026. I begin by making the Government's position very clear. We absolutely recognise that the question of legal recognition for people who wish to identify as non-binary is important. This is not, therefore, a question of whether the concerns raised by this Bill deserve consideration. They absolutely do. The question before us is whether this particular Bill provides an appropriate, workable and sufficiently considered way of addressing these concerns. It is the Government's view that this Bill does not. The Bill is not very basic, to quote Deputy Coppinger's words. It makes very significant changes, not just to the Gender Recognition Act 2015 but also to the Civil Registration Act 2004, the Employment Equality Act 1998, the Equal Status Act 2000 and the Interpretation Act 2005. These are changes with implications that extend well beyond the gender recognition system itself. For that reason, the Government cannot support this Bill as it is drafted.

The Government is already committed to examining non-binary recognition and it is absolutely vital to re-emphasise that while opposing this particular Bill, the Government is not opposing the consideration of legal recognition for non-binary people. In response to the review of the Gender Recognition Act, Government Departments and other public bodies were tasked by Government with considering and taking positive steps to improve the position of people who are non-binary. The review of the Act also included a recommendation relating to making legal gender recognition available to people who are non-binary. The National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028 contains a commitment to progress that recommendation. As part of that work, the Government is pursuing an impact assessment on legal recognition. This involves a detailed examination across Government Departments and

State bodies on how the introduction of a third gender category could be accommodated from both a policy and an operational perspective. That is the appropriate approach. Before making the kind of change with implications across the Statute Book and public administration, we need to understand those implications properly. Legal recognition of a third gender should be progressed on the basis of careful analysis and an implementable framework, rather than legislating first and addressing the consequences afterwards.

The Bill goes considerably further than simply recognising a non-binary gender. The Bill is presented as providing for the recognition of a non-binary gender and people who are born intersex but its legal consequences are much broader. Section 2 would insert into the Gender Recognition Act a right for every person resident in the State to change their recorded gender to female, male or non-binary. This is a particularly significant provision because it is drafted without an age qualification. The Government's concern is therefore that the provision will create a universal entitlement, regardless of age, undermining the safeguards that apply to children under the age of 18 under the existing gender recognition framework. Whatever view Members may take on the appropriate arrangements for children, changes of that significance should follow a deliberate consideration of children's circumstances and the appropriate safeguards. This should not arise simply as a consequence of a broadly drafted Bill.

I am also particularly concerned about the proposed amendments to the civil registration system. Section 6 addresses the recording of sex in registers relating to births, stillbirths, adoptions and deaths, including provision for an X entry. The General Register Office assessment identifies a fundamental difficulty with this approach. It considers that the proposal would change existing arrangements by enabling the qualified informant registering the event to determine the sex recorded, rather than relying on the present medical determination.

The Bill also does not clarify the process by which an existing medical determination of male or female could be amended to X when it is being registered. That is not simply an administrative change. Civil registration records fulfil functions that are quite distinct from the recognition of a person's gender identity.

The proposed change could affect the viability of gender data drawn from those registers and currently used by the Central Statistics Office in measuring health and demographic indicators. We therefore need to distinguish carefully between two issues: recognising a person's gender for legal purposes, and recording sex within the State's system of civil registration. This Bill risks bringing those distinct questions together without adequately resolving the consequences.

The implications of the Bill also extend across legislation and public services. The Bill would propose to amend the Interpretation Act 2005. Section 5 proposes rules under which words importing the masculine or feminine gender would also import a non-binary gender, together with a corresponding provision concerning references to a non-binary gender in future legislation and statutory instruments. Again, that is not an insignificant or purely technical amendment. So much existing legislation and service delivery and so many Government systems operate on the basis of two gender categories. The introduction of an additional legal category, therefore, requires us to examine carefully how it interacts with existing legislation and with the systems through which public services are delivered. In addition, it is anticipated that significant costs would follow, requiring changes across Government Departments and existing systems. Those operational consequences need to be identified and understood before

legislation takes effect, yet section 9 provides that the legislation would commence six months after enactment, or earlier if the Minister for Social Protection so orders. Given the breadth of the proposed changes, the Government does not believe we should create new statutory obligations without first establishing clearly how they would operate across the State.

Employment and equality provisions also require proper consideration. The Bill proposes amendments to both the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000. These would introduce a new "sexual characteristics ground" relating to a person being intersex. The objective of ensuring protection from discrimination is important, but amendments to the State's equality framework need to be coherent with the wider body of equality law. They should be examined as part of a considered legislative process, including the practical and legal interaction with existing protections. A legitimate objective does not remove the need to ensure the legislative mechanism used to achieve it is sound.

The better course is the work already under way. There is, therefore, an important distinction at the heart of the Government's position. We are not saying that the issue of non-binary recognition should not be considered. We are saying that a change of this breadth requires proper examination before legislation is enacted. We already have a mechanism through which that work is being undertaken.

The impact assessment process under the national LGBTIQ+ inclusion strategy is examining how recognition of a third gender category could be accommodated across Departments and State bodies from policy and operational perspectives. That work gives us the opportunity to identify the legislative implications, the effects on civil registration, the implications for children and the safeguards that may be required, the operational consequences for Departments and public bodies, the changes required to State systems, and the associated implementation implications and costs. That is a more responsible foundation on which to make a significant change to our legal framework.

In conclusion, I again acknowledge the absolute importance of the issues raised and assure the House that the Government is committed to progressing the legitimate interests of those seeking legal recognition. However, for the reasons I have outlined, the Government is opposing this particular Bill.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I commend Deputy Coppinger, on bringing this Bill forward, and all the groups and organisations that have been campaigning for legal recognition for intersex and non-binary people. To me, it is a very straightforward and simple issue. Nobody should be denied, dismissed, discriminated against or persecuted because of who they are. To fail to respect people for who they are and to fail to give them legal recognition is not just an issue for the people whose rights are being denied; it is also an issue for the whole of society because it is a slippery slope when you start to deny people their rights for who they are.

That is why it is no coincidence that the leading aggressor against LGBTQ+ people is somebody like Donald Trump, who not only lacks respect for LGBTQ+ people, but is making war against everybody. He is making war against women, he is making war against people of colour, he is making war against Palestinians, he is making war against people of Islamic faith; you name it. He is making war against multiple countries. When you concede to monsters like Trump, it is a slippery slope, so it is important to stand up to them.

I do not believe for one minute all the excuses that the Government has given for opposing this Bill, about how it is complicated and there is a better way of doing it and so on. If the Government has any legitimate concerns about technical or inadvertent consequences or whatever, they can be dealt with at the next Stage. The Government can bring forward amendments. The truth is that the Government itself, in the 2018 review, recommended legal recognition for non-binary and intersex people, and the Government has done absolutely nothing about it, and has no intention of doing anything about it, because it is leaning into and capitulating to the hate agenda of the far-right, Trump, and so on. That is the reality of what is going on and that is why the Government is opposing the Bill. It is shameful, quite honestly. It is absolutely shameful that the Government is doing it, but not surprising, given it is also leaning into so many of the other hateful aspects of the far-right agenda and the Trump agenda, whether it is in terms of how it deals with immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and so on. All of that is particularly shameful given our history.

We do not believe the Minister. It is shameful but we intend to continue to fight for the basic rights of people to be respected, recognised and acknowledged for who they are, and for their rights to be vindicated accordingly.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: The Gender Recognition Act 2015 was a significant achievement, making Ireland one of the first countries in the world to provide for legal gender recognition on the basis of self-determination. However, as many LGBTQI organisations have pointed out, that framework does not currently provide for non-binary people and leaves important issues affecting intersex people unresolved.

One lesson I have always taken from my engagement with our community is that progress cannot stop with the achievements of the past. The 2015 Act was a good start, but the need remains to address the outstanding recommendations of the 2018 review process, including legal recognition for non-binary people and greater recognition of the experience of intersex people. This Bill is a positive step forward towards that and I thank Deputy Coppinger for bringing it forward today.

We should recognise that other jurisdictions have already moved in this direction. The use of an X marker is now an established feature in a number of countries and is recognised within international travel documentation standards.

Legal recognition matters in many very practical ways. When a person's identity documents do not accurately reflect who they are, it can create barriers to everyday life, whether that is in accessing services, travelling, applying for employment or engaging with public bodies. Advocacy organisations have consistently highlighted the impact that a lack of recognition can have on well-being, on safety and on participation in society. I want to highlight the experience of intersex people, a group whose voices are too often absent from public debate and whose experiences remain poorly understood. As a Minister, I was conscious of how little public awareness exists regarding intersex people and the challenges they face. Intersex people are not rare. They have always existed in every society and every community, yet our laws, institutions and our public services have absolutely failed to reflect that reality.

This has meant that many intersex people continue to experience invisibility, misunderstanding and stigma throughout their lives. This Bill seeks to address some of these gaps. It would allow for the recognition of intersex people within our civil registration system

and would provide explicit protection against discrimination on the grounds of sexual characteristics. These are practical, legal changes that would provide greater protection for a community that has been too often overlooked.

This is more than a symbolic action. When official systems fail to acknowledge people's experiences, that has real-world consequences. It can affect access to services, interactions with public bodies, healthcare experiences and a person's sense of belonging in a society. Many intersex people continue to face stigma and barriers in discussing their health and personal experiences, even with their own healthcare professionals, and greater recognition can play an important role in challenging that stigma.

We should also listen carefully to the concerns raised by intersex people regarding bodily autonomy and informed consent. While this Bill does not address every issue facing the intersex community, organisations representing intersex people have argued that it is an important step towards a society in which people have greater control over how they are recognised and understood by the State.

I welcome this legislation. It is important we engage seriously and respectfully with the lived experience of intersex and non-binary people. They deserve to be heard, they deserve dignity and equal treatment and they deserve laws that recognise them as full and valued members of our society.

Deputy Seamus Healy: I welcome and support this legislation and thank Deputy Coppinger for bringing it forward. This Bill is about human rights for a small percentage of people. It is deeply disappointing - in fact, it is shocking - that the Minister and the Government are opposing this legislation. The Minister used a very poor excuse. I believe it is disingenuous because, as the Minister well knows, if he had difficulties with this Bill he could use the legislative process, pre-legislative scrutiny and the Oireachtas committee system to bring forward any amendments he deems necessary. He chose not to do that and to say we need further examination. The Government has had eight years for further examination since the review in 2018. I believe the Minister's position is, unfortunately and sadly, disingenuous.

I remind the Minister that the review in 2018 proposed the introduction of gender recognition for children of any age under the principle of parental consent; that this be an administrative process, with a straightforward revocation process as currently exists for adults; and that voluntary family mediation be made available for those who wish to accept it. The Minister of the day accepted those recommendations. The recommendation with regard to young people aged 16 and 17 was to introduce a simplified process on the basis of self-declaration with parental consent, a straightforward revocation process and with voluntary family mediation available. Various other recommendations in that report were accepted by the then Minister, including a recommendation for a process for Irish citizens born in the Six Counties to be able to access Irish legal gender recognition. That was another recommendation which was accepted by the Minister of the day.

The Minister has had six years to examine and investigate this. Unfortunately, it would appear that the Government is bending to the far right. Despite what the Minister might have said in his contribution, there is no indication of when the Minister might bring forward legislation of his own. The Minister should reconsider his position, accept Deputy Coppinger's legislation, and amend it during the legislative process and parliamentary scrutiny.

Deputy David Cullinane: I thank Deputy Coppinger for moving this Bill. At its core, this issue is about people. It is about non-binary people who live in our communities, who are part of our families, and who are our friends, colleagues and neighbours. It is about something fairly basic: being recognised for who you are and being treated with respect. For most people dealing with the State, filling in a form or producing an official document is fairly routine. You tick a box and you move on. However, if neither of the boxes in front of you reflects who you are, then something that is straightforward for everybody else becomes another reminder that the system was not designed with you in mind. This can mean having to explain yourself. It can mean having to disclose personal information. It can mean repeatedly being put in a position where somebody else gets to question who you are. Over time, that takes its toll.

While this Bill deals with legislation, certificates, registers and legal definitions, we should not lose sight of what sits behind all of that: real people and their experience. These are people who want to get on with their lives in exactly the same way as everybody else, who want to be treated decently and who should not have to fight with the State simply to have their identity recognised. That, in my view, is why this Bill matters.

The Non-Binary and Intersex Recognition Bill would allow a person to have their gender legally recognised as non-binary. It would provide for an "X" marker alongside "M" and "F" on a gender recognition certificate. It would make changes to civil registration. It would provide explicit protection against discrimination for intersex people. It would make consequential changes to the way gender is dealt with in legislation.

The core intent of the Bill is a simple one. If someone is non-binary, should the State continue to insist they choose either "male" or "female" for the purposes of legal gender recognition? I do not believe it should and that is why Sinn Féin will be supporting this Bill. For somebody who is not non-binary, this may sound like a small administrative change but we all know it means much more than that. It means that when you deal with the State, the State acknowledges that you exist as you are. It means that an official document can reflect who you are rather than forcing you into a category which does not. It removes one more situation in which somebody has to explain themselves, justify themselves, or disclose something deeply personal, simply because the system was not designed with them in mind. I believe that really matters.

There are young, non-binary people growing up in Ireland today. There are adults who have spent much of their lives feeling there was no space for them in the legal framework of this State that we collectively created. There are parents who simply want their child to be happy, safe and able to live their life without being subjected to hostility or unnecessary barriers.

Our politics should be capable of approaching these people and families with empathy. This does not mean we do not examine legalisation carefully; of course we should. There are aspects of this Bill which need to be worked through. If it proceeds, we need to look carefully at how it interacts with the existing rules on gender recognition. We need to maintain the distinction between being non-binary and being intersex because we know they are different things. There will be practical issues around State records and IT systems. There may be issues around international documents and systems. The proposed amendment to the Interpretation Act deserves detailed legal scrutiny because it could have implications across other areas of law. All of these issues are ones that can and should be examined on Committee Stage. We all know

that if we want legislation to work, we have an obligation to scrutinise it. The problem is that the Government is not even allowing the Bill to get to Committee Stage. The Minister said earlier that the Government has a different way and that it is committed to change in this area. Where is it? Where is the Government's plan, because a lot of these changes were ones that were recommended? In fact the Government said it would make them when we first had the Gender Recognition Act, and then when we had the review of it, and people are still waiting. It really rings hollow for people when they hear that.

If implementation has to be phased, then plan it properly. There are issues that can be worked through. For me, the most important thing is that we start from the right place and that right place is recognition and respect.

I also want to say something about people who are born intersex, because being intersex and being non-binary are not the same. Intersex people are born with variations in sex characteristics. Their experiences and healthcare needs can be very different. This Bill would provide recognition for people who are born intersex - who do not identify as either male or female - and that recognition is really important.

It is essential, too, that people who are born intersex receive the healthcare they need from birth to adulthood and that a model of care is in place which values the autonomy and dignity of that person, reserving decisions about their sex characteristics, where possible, for them to make as they develop and mature. As we develop policy in this area, we need to listen directly to intersex people. We should not simply talk about them in the Chamber but listen to them, their families and healthcare professionals with expertise in their care and ensure people are given clear information and have a meaningful say in decisions about their health and bodies.

However, we need to urgently address another part of this debate. Legal recognition is really important, but so too is healthcare. We have had several debates on this issue in the House. The gender healthcare system in this State is broken beyond repair. A new model of care has been developed, but people who are intersex, non-binary and trans have been badly let down because the system simply does not exist. People are being put on waiting lists that go nowhere. They are waiting years and years. There are no options or pathways for them. As the Sinn Féin spokesperson on health, this concerns me very greatly.

The reality is that intersex and non-binary people in Ireland have been failed by the lack of timely access to healthcare. They are waiting years. As I said, some people have, in effect, been told to put part of their lives on hold while they wait for the public system. We need to think about what that actually means. People may have spent years trying to understand how they feel and struggle to speak about it. People may have had difficult conversations with their families or the people closest to them. They may already be dealing with anxiety or isolation. When they eventually reach out for healthcare and supports, the State and supports are not there and they are faced with more waits. Waiting times can be measured in years, in many cases. It is simply not acceptable. Nobody in the State should have to wait years to simply begin a conversation about their healthcare.

As I said, work is under way on a new model of care for gender healthcare. The new model needs to be brought forward, published and properly resourced, and needs to fundamentally improve the experience of the people using the service. There is little value in announcing a new model of care if the patient still cannot get through the door.

Several principles should guide the new model. First, it must be person centred. The person seeking healthcare cannot be an afterthought in the design of the service, which is very often the case. Non-binary, intersex and trans people have to be involved. Their experiences of the existing service have to inform what replaces it. We need to know what went wrong, what the barriers are, why people waited so long, why it was the case they felt they had nowhere to go, what supports they now need and what we can make available. Lived experience should sit alongside clinical evidence and professional expertise.

We need, of course, all of the specialists providing that care because gender healthcare cannot exist as an isolated service, disconnected from the wider health system. There needs to be primary care involvement. There are obviously specialist needs. People should not have to co-ordinate all of that themselves and navigate through a system only to find that the healthcare supports are not there. A functioning healthcare service should co-ordinate care around the patient. We need greater regional access. We need to build expertise and capacity so that people are not forced into enormous national bottlenecks. We need to know that specialist intervention is available.

It was said earlier that, for adults, autonomy matters. Adults are entitled to information. They are entitled to understand the benefits and risks and make informed decisions about their healthcare and identity. I refer to the intent behind the Bill. That principle should not suddenly disappear simply because we are talking about healthcare or legal responsibilities and accessing forms in the same way that any of us do. We have to make sure that recognition of the individual, and accepting people for who they are when they tell us who they are, are central to how we combat these issues.

I am very concerned by what I heard from the Minister who opened this debate. Over the past years, I have watched as a lot of promises have been made on reforming healthcare services, including the gender model of care which was promised. We are still waiting, and I suspect will be waiting for a long time before we see any changes and that new model of care. I would wager that it will be a long time - I would say we could measure it in years - before the Government comes back with any plan.

The Government is sitting here today and is saying to Deputy Coppinger and those of us on this side of the House to trust it and it will come forward with a plan. I do not believe anybody believes that. I do not believe a single person in the Chamber, including the Minister of State who is sitting here, genuinely believes that the Government is going to do anything at all in this area. That means the Government is letting down a section of our society, albeit a very small section.

As Deputy Boyd Barrett said, they are under attack from Trump and others. They are a small cohort of the population and deserve to be treated with respect. I do not believe they are being treated with respect when Ministers are being disingenuous and offer up any and every reason they cannot support a Bill when we know the issues raised can be dealt with on Committee Stage. I have raised some practical issues that I want to see addressed on Committee Stage. Scrutiny of any Bill is important. It is the last refuge of a scoundrel when Ministers come to the House and say they are not supporting a Bill because there are technical problems with it. It is an excuse. Let us call it what it is. It is not factual or based on goodwill, good faith or anything other than that the Government does not want to do anything in this

area. That is the reality of the situation as far as I can see it. We have an opportunity, through Deputy Coppinger's Bill, to address this issue and we should do so.

People who are non-binary have waited a long time for the Government to act. The Minister of State now needs to set out in his closing remarks exactly what the Government is going to do. Ministers cannot come to the House and say they will oppose a Bill and set out all of the reasons for that, and then not set out a plan of their own. I have not heard such a plan from the Minister of State and I want to hear it. For all of the reasons I have given, Sinn Féin will support the Bill as proposed by Deputy Coppinger.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: This is an important debate. I thank Deputy Coppinger for bringing the Bill forward and allowing us to have this debate. It is probably the first time there has been a substantial debate in the Oireachtas around intersex, in particular, and non-binary issues in this way. That is historic and important and I want to congratulate the Deputy for all of the work she has done on this.

I was sorry to miss the Minister's opening statement. The health committee is currently sitting. I was chairing it and wanted to step out to take part in this debate. I understand the Government will oppose the Bill, which is deeply disappointing. The Social Democrats support the intention of the Bill, and the need to recognise non-binary people and advance LGBTQI rights. It is simple and straightforward and the Government should be doing that. It would cost the State absolutely nothing, but the Government, as it has done time and again, refuses to address the issue. There has been a failure on the part of successive Governments to advance any rights in terms of intersex and non-binary people in the State. It is shocking, disappointing and deeply frustrating.

I want to speak about the non-binary provisions in the Bill. Daire Dempsey, the executive director of TENI, stated that with the passage of the ground breaking Gender Recognition Act 2015, Ireland told trans men and women that the State believes them to be who they are. They went on to say that unfortunately, this is not extended to non-binary people who are not recognised in Irish law or Irish passports or any other document. When your documents do not match who you are, it is alienating, distressing and can be deeply unsafe. I hope the Minister of State hears that. Irish citizens have said that the failure of the State to recognise them is deeply distressing and can be unsafe for them. These are not new recommendations. Time and again, there have been recommendations to advance changes in the law because we know non-binary people are not recognised. It is very difficult for young people to get recognition under the Gender Recognition Act. Irish citizens in the North are not recognised under the Act.

A review in 2018 made a series of recommendations, namely to legalise non-binary recognition, a cross-governmental review on the proposed legislative amendments and an impact assessment and for public bodies to take positive steps to improve the position of non-binary people. In 2019, the then Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection published a response to the proposed changes and said that a deeper level of impact assessment was needed. Some eight years later, the Minister has said the same thing, namely that we still need to do an impact assessment, to do more work and to look at this.

11 o'clock

Why does it take so long for the Government to do anything in this area? Why does it take until eight years after recommendations are made for it to make progress on what are simple, administrative changes that would recognise people in law? These are not fundamental reforms that are going to cost money but a simple change, yet we have seen no progress. This is despite these recommendations being included in the first national LGBTI strategy in 2019, the Department of Social Protection's statement of strategy for 2023 and so on. There has been recommendation after recommendation but a failure to implement that changes required to recognise non-binary people in the law.

It is being done in other countries. Austria, Germany, Iceland and Malta provide for non-binary gender recognition and we should do it too. If other European countries are moving ahead with X markers on identity documents, then that is the approach we should take. The European courts have also delivered a series of judgments that recognise and reinforce the rights of trans and non-binary people, including in the area of gender recognition. In 2024, there was the Mirin case in which the court ruled name and gender marker changes made in one EU country must be automatically recognised by other EU states, meaning there is an obligation on the State to do that. There were a series of other cases, including the Mousse case, where the court recognised non-binary people's existence in the EU for the first time. In this case, the court GDPR provides protections for trans and non-binary people and under EU law everybody is protected against identity discrimination, including non-binary people. Ireland's inaction on non-binary recognition is therefore going against these trends at the EU level and ignores the recognition within EU law, so we need to see progress. There is a trend internationally and we should make progress on the recognition of non-binary people.

It is similar with the intersex recommendations. Sorcha Ní Fhaoláin of Intersex Ireland said:

> Despite there being at least as many intersex people as there are people with red hair, most people including our GPs know very little about us. Recognition is an important part of addressing issues intersex people face as it is a step toward reducing stigma that keeps intersex people from being able to talk about our lives and our health with friends, family and even our doctors.

It is really important we bring the voices of intersex and trans people into the debate because there is an underrepresentation of people from minority communities in the Oireachtas. Again, there is a failure to implement recommendations. The national LGBTI strategy had two intersex recommendations, neither of which has been progressed. In my previous role in LGBT Ireland, we produced a shadow report on Ireland's LGBTI strategy and when we were doing that report we went through each of the actions in it and graded the Government on those from A to F. On all the trans and intersex actions, the Government got an F. It was willing to progress some of the other actions concerning lesbian, gay and bisexual issues but on the trans and intersex actions there was an absolute failure by the Government to even do the simple scoping exercise promised in terms of intersex people and data collection. That was in 2019 and there was an absolute failure to progress them. We have had years of failure and today is another disappointing step in the sad record of this Government and the previous one.

There are people watching from the Gallery and from home. I want to let them know we will keep fighting for them even if the Government opposes it. We will keep advancing LGBT

rights and people do not need the Minister's approval to be who they are. We see you, you are loved, you are valued and you are respected. Let us keep fighting.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I thank Deputy Coppinger and her team for bringing forward this crucial legislation. I also thank all the organisations that fight so hard for the rights of the LGBTQI+ community and specifically today those who are fighting for the rights of non-binary and intersex people because it is a hard graft when you are part of a minority but are a minority within that minority and when that minority is more and more demonised by the day. The people in this minority are weaponised by political forces across our globe who are promoting a fascistic and gender-conservative world-view and using it as a wedge to advance their own right-wing views.

That is exactly what is happening here. I listened to the Minister, Deputy Calleary, talk about the reasons this legislation will be opposed by the Government and there is nothing in the reasons. He spoke about implications extending well beyond the gender recognition system itself but that is the whole point. Legal gender recognition means people in these categories will no longer face the discrimination they currently experience. It means they will not have to have different experiences from the Minister of State and I when they are being asked for identification and filling in forms. I am irritated there are so many forms that will not accept the fada in my name. I can only imagine how much harder it is when every single time someone has to try to register, express an interest and record their presence in the world they are faced with this binary world-view which forces itself upon them again and again.

The Gender Recognition Act delivered a milestone for this community. I worked in the rights and equality space at the time and remember my colleagues across Europe heralding Ireland as being so progressive on this and talking to me about the implications and how they could advance those things within their countries. Let us remember that when the 2015 Act was passed, the sky did not fall in. There were none of the disasters predicted from certain corners of our society. Not only that, there were no floodgates or any of the issues there was scaremongering about ahead of that Act being introduced. However, we have not only stalled since then as a society but gone backwards because so many other jurisdictions have gone ahead and recognised a third gender to facilitate this micro-marginalised, discriminated-against community. It was recommended, as many speakers have said, as part of the review and is operational and fully functioning in multiple jurisdictions. All the objections from the Government are about putting this on the long finger and none are things that cannot be dealt with at a later stage.

I will speak briefly to the concept of the binary view of gender because not only is our law and policy lagging behind in this space but so too are we as politicians if we do not put forward a more comprehensive and progressive non-binary view of gender. Our younger generations are way ahead of us here and understand this in a way that means we will be there eventually and will ultimately live in a society that does not see women and men as completely binary genders. I will welcome and am so excited about the day when that happens but we have the opportunity as political leaders not only to push for it in our law and policy – and we should remember this is just a first step – but also to be political leaders for our constituents and our communities and to help others understand the misinformation flowing around this topic is vast and that we need to cut through it and help people understand this is a rights issue. As Deputy

Rice said, this costs the Government nothing but right now it daily costs this community their respect, their dignity and their rights.

Deputy Mark Wall: I welcome the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Labour Party about this especially important Bill. I thank Deputy Coppinger for bringing it forward and welcome our visitors to the Public Gallery.

The Labour Party is immensely proud of its track record of supporting the LGBTQI+ community, including those who are non-binary and people who are intersex. The Labour Party legislated for gender recognition in government back in 2015. On 16 July, as part of statements on Pride, I outlined further legislation my party has brought forward, including the promise to hold a referendum on marriage equality, which as well know passed by a landslide. Many of the civil rights passed in this House were because of the Labour Party and it is something we are very proud to say. At the end of 2025, the Labour Party used its Private Members' time to move a motion on transgender healthcare that called for a new model of trans healthcare that was not just designed for the community, but for the members of the trans community and their families. That day, as on many other days, I and my Labour Party colleagues called for safe and effective healthcare services that are patient-informed.

Many trans, non-binary and intersex people simply do not feel listened to by government and they simply do not exist in legal and administrative systems. During the general election the Labour Party manifesto contained a commitment to address these very issues. It is something we are deeply committed to and which we will continue to bring forward and address. In reviewing this Bill, I spoke with friends and colleagues from the intersex community about the proposals it contains. They are incredibly happy to see their concerns and important issues are being debated in this House. Such aims will make a massive difference to their lives, which are currently exceedingly difficult day in and day out for them and their families. I know that from the conversations I have had with them, the issues that have been raised with me and the many other emails and messages I have received about this Bill in advance of today. That is why it is so important to have this debate in their Parliament to start recognising the needs and issues of these communities in our State.

That is why we support the fundamental aims of this Bill to ensure that non-binary and intersex people can live their lives with dignity. However, as has previously been said by other contributors, this is not perfect legislation and we believe it will require significant changes via amendments if it progresses beyond Second Stage, which we sincerely hope it does. The Bill conflates intersex characteristics that concern innate physical sex characteristics with non-binary identity that concerns gender identity. We believe it would be more appropriate to address these issues through separate legislative provisions. As drafted, the Bill uses a single marker "X" for both groups, with different meanings on different documents. An X on a death certificate would signify a non-binary or intersex person, whereas on a birth certificate it would signify an intersex person. This has the potential to be problematic and to cause confusion. Intersex and non-binary people need protection and recognition and we must ensure that we do not inadvertently legislate to create more legal uncertainty.

The Bill can also be interpreted to provide absolute discretion for a parent on whether or not to assign gender at birth. We believe there is a need for medical criteria here, and that there are also medical privacy concerns. As other contributors have said, let us have the debate on

Committee Stage. Let us make sure that we have the debate and that we get it right. Non-binary and intersex people have waited long enough for the law to catch up with their lives. It is time for us to act.

I repeat my party's steadfast commitment to advancing the rights of those who identify as non-binary and people who are intersex. They have waited too long for this debate. As I said previously in the House, we must stand with them today and every day. I look forward to working constructively with Deputy Coppinger on this very important Bill, and with all those who stand up for the marginalised in this House every single day.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: I thank Deputy Coppinger for bringing forward this Bill. I am really disappointed in the Government's response and that it is not facilitating the passage of the Bill to Committee Stage. The Government is either in favour of the principle of recognising non-binary and intersex persons or it is not. It is a well-established principle in this House that even if there are difficulties with the technical aspects of a particular Bill, if the Government is in favour of the principle, it facilitates its passage to Committee Stage. It is really disappointing and indeed disingenuous of the Government to say that it is going to vote down the Bill.

We need to be very clear on the message we want to send out today to the non-binary and intersex people in our communities and across the country. We want them to know that we stand with them and we support them in seeking the recognition that they are seeking and that they deserve. They are our family members, our neighbours and our friends. Their existence is not up for debate, even if many across the world are now trying to roll back the clock. It is critically important that we send that message out today to those who want to turn us back to the dark ages. We are not going back. Non-binary and intersex people deserve to watch a debate today in our national Parliament with the sensitivity and compassion that it demands. We in the Labour Party fundamentally believe in their right to live a life with dignity and to be protected from discrimination and stigma. They have a right to the proper medical assistance and support if they need it. Let us be in no doubt as to the challenges today for those who live as non-binary or intersex persons in terms of their health issues, stigma and safety issues.

That is the position from which I believe we need to start this debate. We must remember we are talking about a very small number of vulnerable people, often invisible in many communities, but they are there and we need to start talking about them. As my colleague Deputy Wall said, we in the Labour Party are extremely proud of our record for LGBTQ+I people in this country; starting with the decriminalisation of homosexuality; the disregard for those with criminal convictions for homosexuality; same-sex marriage; the marriage equality referendum, and of course the groundbreaking Gender Recognition Act in 2015. I am not convinced such a Bill would go through these Houses if it were brought forward now, 11 years later. It is a testament to the commitment of the Labour Party in government at that time, and to the many groups working in that space, to get that Bill over the line. It is long past time that we had recognition for non-binary persons. It is eight years since the review of the 2015 Act took place when was a clear and unambiguous recommendation for non-binary recognition. We have had lots of welcome references to recognition for non-binary persons in the first and second national LGBTI inclusion strategies, but there has been no progress. Talk is cheap. The reality is the Government will be judged on the basis of its actions.

I must be honest on looking at the detail of the Bill itself, there is a lot of work to be done to make sure the Bill could become operable and deliver for non-binary and intersex persons. I have concerns that there is a conflation of sex and gender in how the Bill is drafted. The terms "non-binary" and "intersex" are in some ways being used interchangeably when they are very much not. They are all technical details. The principle here is whether or not we believe in recognition. It is on the Government that it is voting down this Bill today.

I thank Deputy Coppinger for lighting a fire under this issue because it has been there for a number of years, and we need to drive on with it. It would be remiss of me not to use this opportunity to raise the very real health issues for those who are trans, intersex and non-binary. Not every non-binary person will require medical support but some do and the reality is that we have a disgraceful and outrageous situation in this country where the National Gender Service has a waiting list of 2,500 people, some of whom have been waiting four and a half years. We had a situation last year where the waiting list was closed and it was only reopened due to ministerial intervention. The reality is that we have a failed system of care. As my colleague Deputy Wall said, last December we brought forward an important motion in the House calling for a new model of care. I am aware that work is ongoing with regard to the new model of care but it is disappointing that two of the groups that were part of designing the new model of care have walked away. We need to support the other groups that are within the framework. The reality is that we need to start delivering for trans, non-binary and intersex people in this country. We need to have a new model of care on the basis of dignity, respect and trust. It is wrong that people have to travel abroad for care. We need to start providing for those persons in our communities in our State. My last appeal to the Minister of State is to let us have the debate on Committee Stage on the details of Deputy Coppinger's Bill. Let us give the Bill a chance and work out the technical details. For it to fail at the first hurdle is frankly disgraceful and unacceptable.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Aontú believes in a compassionate pluralist Republic. All citizens are equal and valued no matter what their identity, ethnicity, religion or orientation. Everyone should be treated on the basis of their own individual character. Gender dysphoria is real and is not easy for anyone. We need to treat all our citizens with respect and decency but it is also really important that we have a society based on science and evidence. Gender ideology as represented in the Bill from the far left today is anti-science and anti-evidence. Proponents of this Bill think that they are fighting on the last front of human rights but in reality they are doing enormous damage to children and women. The Tavistock crisis highlighted the damage that this type of gender ideology does to children. Incredibly, Solidarity campaigned against the findings of Dr. Hilary Cass's report. Solidarity seemingly knows more that this doctor and the party continues to support the giving of puberty-blocking chemicals to children despite the massive health concerns that exist. Some 1,000 families are currently suing the Tavistock Clinic because their children were rushed into irreversible physical and psychological transitions without adequate assessment or mental health support. Health services across the world are reversing from this type of gender ideology at the moment. All major sporting organisations are reversing from this damaging gender ideology as well. The idea of putting men competing in women's sport is wrong. Women's sport has come so far in recent years, yet at this time it seems that this ideology thinks it is logical to put men competing in women's sport.

Incredibly, Solidarity also believes that male sex offenders can be put into women's prisons. This is not a theoretical issue. Barbie Kardashian threatened to torture, rape and murder his mother. When he was put into a women's prison, he threatened to rape female prison guards and female inmates. Only in a world where an intellectual fashion such as this is more important than science, is it okay to put a male sex offender into a women's prison. This is another proof that the Gender Recognition Act is extremely damaging legislation.

Instead of repealing this law, the Bill goes further in trying to create a third gender. Why stop at three? If we are going to ignore the sex chromosomes in every cell of every human being, surely the choice should be unlimited. The reality is that people oppose this ideology too. In 2016, Solidarity received 42,000 votes. In 2024, that figure collapsed to 13,000. Solidarity is falling into the same trap as so many left-wing parties across the world; it is ignoring the bread-and-butter issues facing the people it is meant to serve and getting completely distracted by these intellectual fashions.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Thanks for the advice

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: By taking these anti-science positions, we are doing the most damage to the most vulnerable. The question is whether the Government will follow its lead.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: This is not a debate on the intricacies of what defines trans. I support the principles of the Bill. I am paired with Deputy James Lawless so I will not be voting today but were I voting on Second Stage, I would vote in favour of the Bill. I want to put this on the record.

It is important that no intersex infant is forced by bureaucracy or parental pressure into rigid binary assignment at birth. Equally, our laws have ignored the lived realities of non-binary people, who deserve full legal recognition. I support both these aims. As my Labour Party colleagues have mentioned, as legislators we have a duty to ensure that our laws are structurally sound, and what they are saying is that we will possibly have to debate this on Committee Stage. The proposal in the Bill to use a single catch-all X marker inadvertently conflates two entirely different things. These are the physical biological sex characteristics identified at birth or puberty and the definition of a legal transition, which includes subjective gender identity.

Medical data shows that fewer than 3% of intersex variations are visible at birth and a lot are discovered much later, during puberty or adulthood. All intersex people have a right to be identified as intersex at any stage. The Bill uses a single marker to address both a birth trait and an adult's self-determined identity, which I also respect. However, a newborn infant cannot possess a non-binary identity and forcing this identity to retroactively replace an objective biological marker at birth would create legal contradictions. The Gender Recognition Act needs to be reformed and updated. A person transitioning is not the same as a person who has a non-binary gender identity.

These issues need to be discussed more and there are various international views on this. I support the Bill passing Second Stage and I urge the Government to support it. We need amendments to be discussed. We should create a specific biological marker at birth, such as an "I" marker for intersex infants and, later, adults, to accurately reflect biological variations

and we should also have distinct and separate identification for non-binary adults who wish to legally declare their identity.

Deputy Michael Collins: From all I can gather, the Government has made a decision to oppose the Bill today, which I fully support. Before I come to the Bill itself, I have to say it is becoming almost impossible to take People Before Profit seriously. Recently I saw one of its social media posts, which spoke about going from the streets of Paris to the streets of Dublin. At a time when the world has watched scenes of disorder, chaos and intimidation on the streets of Paris, and not the peaceful protests we do here, I find this message absolutely outrageous. Ordinary families want safe communities and small business owners want to be able to open their doors without fear. Yet here we are with politicians seeming to glorify street unrest. If this is the kind of politics they want to import into Ireland, they are completely out of touch with ordinary, decent people.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Like the fuel protests.

Deputy Michael Collins: Peaceful protests all of the time.

When we turn to the Bill, we see even more of the same ideological madness. The Bill asks the Irish people to set aside basic common sense and basic biological reality. It asks us to pretend that something understood by humanity since the beginning of time is now somehow up for debate. A child is not born non-binary; a child is born male or female. A boy is a boy and a girl is a girl. This is not an opinion, an ideology or a political slogan; it is a biological fact. What worries many parents is that activists are increasingly trying to drag children into debates that children should never be burdened with. Children should be allowed to be children. They should be allowed to grow up, develop naturally and enjoy their childhood without adults imposing confusion or ideological theories on them.

When families across Ireland are struggling with the cost of living, when housing remains out of reach for many young people, and when farmers, fishermen and small businesses are fighting to survive, this is what People Before Profit has chosen to spend its time on. Instead of dealing with the real problems facing real people, it is pushing an agenda that most ordinary citizens neither asked for nor understand. Frankly, the vast majority of people listening to this debate will be asking themselves the simple question as to whether these people have completely lost the run of themselves.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: People are struggling at the fuel pump and at the supermarket till. We have 17,885 people in emergency accommodation, 5,830 of whom are children. We have 1 million people on hospital waiting lists. However, the left has brought this Bill before the House. It is not concerned about a family living in a hotel room or a pensioner on a trolley but about the X on a birth certificate.

I truly believe that any adult can live the life they want to choose and I will defend this and die defending it for people. People can do what they like once they are over the age of 18. I do not give a damn what they do so long as they are not hurting anyone else and I believe most people in the country feel the same way. A birth certificate records facts. It records when and where people were born and what sex they are. The Bill before the House seeks to stop this.

The Deputy admits there are no exact figures for non-binary people in Ireland. According to a clinical definition of intersex, it is one birth in about 5,500, or ten babies each year in this country. This means there are ten families who are affected and who need support and the best medical advice and doctors available to them. What I truly believe they do not need is another box to tick on a form.

I fail to understand the Bill's logic and ideology. The Bill is about self-identification but allows somebody else to put an X on a newborn's record. This mark will follow the child for the rest of their medical history. It will follow them into school, hospital, the Passport Office and, eventually, to their death certificate. We do not put a mark on a birth certificate when a child is born with a cleft palate or a physical deformity so why are we putting a mark on a birth certificate that will follow someone? We all know that our medical history is very important to all of us.

I find the Bill defective. It is poorly put together. I have great admiration for any parliamentarian who brings a Bill to the House because it is not easy to do and I appreciate the work that goes into it. However, I would say to those people in this country who feel they are being shouted down for speaking truths and facts that feelings are real and facts are also real but when the two collide, the law must always stand on the side of facts. This is why we will vote against the Bill.

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I acknowledge the importance of the issues raised during the debate and the legitimate interests of people seeking legal recognition. The Government recognises that legal recognition for non-binary people is a significant issue that deserves careful and serious consideration. We also recognise the importance of ensuring that people born intersex are properly protected from discrimination. The question before us, however, is not whether these objectives are worthy because they are; the question is whether the Bill provides a clear, workable and sufficiently considered framework for achieving them. The Government's position is that it does not.

The Bill would make substantial changes to several major legislative frameworks, including the Gender Recognition Act 2015, the Civil Registration Act 2004, the Interpretation Act 2005, the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000. Its consequences would, therefore, extend well beyond the recognition of a non-binary gender.

Serious and obvious unresolved issues remain. Section 2 appears to create a right for every person resident in the State to change their recorded gender to female, male or non-binary without an age qualification. This raises fundamental questions about the safeguards that currently apply to children under the age of 18. Changes of this significance should result from deliberate consideration of children's circumstances and the protections that may be required rather than arising unintentionally from broadly drafted legislation.

The proposed changes to civil registration are also far-reaching. The provisions relating to births, stillbirths, adoptions and deaths would alter how sex may be recorded, including through the introduction of an X entry.

This risks conflating two separate matters: the legal recognition of a person’s gender identity and the recording of sex within the State’s civil registration system.

There are also unresolved questions concerning the Bill's interaction with existing legislation, public service delivery and Government systems, including important health, demographic and statistical functions. Any changes must, therefore, be assessed carefully, including their potential implications. Significant operational work and expenditure would be required across Departments and State bodies. Yet the Bill provides for commencement six months after enactment, or earlier by ministerial order, without first establishing how these changes could be implemented consistently across the State. The proposed equality protections must likewise be coherent within the wider body of equality law. The objective of protecting intersex people from discrimination is important but a legitimate objective does not remove the need for a sound and effective legal or legislative mechanism.

These are not minor technical details that can responsibly be resolved after enactment. The better course is to complete the impact assessment work already under way under the National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028. That process can identify the legislative, administrative, financial and operational implications and provide the evidence required to develop an appropriate and implementable framework. The Government is not closing the door on legal recognition. It is insisting that any change of this importance must be carefully designed, evidence-based and capable of working in practice. For those reasons, while respecting the intention behind the Bill and the many very genuine and substantial contributions made during the debate today, and particularly respecting the people whose interests it seeks to advance, the Government cannot support the Non-binary and Intersex Recognition Bill 2026 as drafted.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): Now to conclude the debate, I call an Teachta Coppinger.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I thank the TDs who committed to support the Bill and for speaking today. I again commend the many groups represented here. I am very sorry they have had to come here today and to listen to what the Government has just said. It is going to oppose a Bill which fits in with commitments that it has given itself in the past but it is proposing absolutely no alternative, no roadmap, no pathway and no nothing. That is really shocking. It is horrific for people to have had to sit and listen to the last ten to 15 minutes as well.

I will just take up some of the issues the Minister raised. First, he spoke about the key reasons for opposing the Bill, and said that no age is indicated in terms of transitioning to X in the gender recognition certificate. The Minister knows the Government could propose an age on the next Stage. He should cop on. If the Minister has a proposal for an age, he can put it forward on the next Stage, so that is absolutely no excuse.

Second, the Minister said we need a very detailed examination of how this proposed legislation would interact with the State and with other legislation the State has enacted. Obviously, when any Bill comes along, it is going to interact and need an examination. That does not prevent the Government from allowing the Bill to progress. The Government has been examining this since 2018. That is the reality of it. What has the Department been doing for the past seven to eight years that it has not got a handle on that? I believe that just as other people said, the sky would not fall in if Departments had to facilitate M, F or Other in

recognising people who they interact with, for example. I do not see any big fallout or interaction from that.

In terms of birth certificates, the Minister said a parent could register their child as a different sex from what was medically determined. Now, I am not sure why parents would choose to do that, to be honest. I do not see that arising very much at all. To be honest, we live in such a binary world that it is very unlikely. The Minister knows that the issue here is that we currently have a situation where medical surgery is being done on babies. It was interesting to hear about the dangers to children. The only surgery happening on children in this country is what is being done to intersex babies or children who do not fit the male and female binary in hospitals. Neither the Minister nor the Minister of State even referred to that, by the way, in their speeches. This proposal is to facilitate and recognise intersex people. Some people in the Labour Party and so on have asked why we conflated the two things. The reason is that when we were looking at non-binary recognition, we felt it was important to recognise intersex people. The only way this can be done is by also allowing for that to be done in birth certs. Mainly, however, it is to give parents the space so that they are not forced down the horrific types of surgery that have been done on children in the past.

This legislation is also about recognising anyone outside the gender binary in legislation. We would not even be talking about intersex people today if I had not put that into the Bill. This is the first time, probably, that there has been any discussion in the Dáil of intersex persons and the fact that they exist. Now, it would be laughable, if it was not actually serious, to listen to Aontú talking about science. Its Deputies are the ones who are being unscientific. It is a scientific reality that not all children are born with male or female characteristics. That is just a scientific reality. The Government agrees with that. That is why it signed up to the Council of Ministers' statement on equal rights for intersex persons. The Government does not disagree with that but it is just not going to do anything about it, it would seem.

Regarding some of the other stuff that was said, it was like transphobe bingo from Aontú there. Misogyny, transphobia and racism are key characteristics of that party. I certainly am not going to take any lecture from members of Aontú about what would happen. First of all, the way they were talking about rape was very triggering for a lot of people and they really should be a lot more careful. I am not going to take any lessons about dangers to women. Women are mainly in danger from men, and it is usually men they know. It is sometimes councillors they know as well, which has, I know, arisen with Aontú. Misogyny and transphobia go hand in hand, so I am not going to spend any longer on it.

In terms of Independent Ireland asking why we are bringing this Bill forward with all the problems in the world, we can do two things at the one time. It is very possible. We can actually stand for recognition and human rights and care about people's economic well-being as well. When I introduced the first repeal Bill in this Dáil, which was initially obviously voted down, except by a tiny handful of Members, I was also fighting on the issue of the housing crisis. The two things can actually go hand in hand.

In terms of some of the nonsense that we heard, I did state a figure. I said the UN estimates that 1.7% of people in the world are intersex. That is 1 in 500. It is not 1 in 10,000, as was stated. What I said was there are no figures for people identifying as non-binary in the same way.

In the last few minutes, I want to talk about some of the countries that have moved forward. Starting with non-binary recognition, these countries include Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Malta, the Netherlands, Canada, Costa Rica, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Pakistan, Nepal, India and Bangladesh. In the US, 22 states have non-binary recognition, even under Trump and his fascistic regime. There is intersex recognition in a number of countries as well, and about nine countries have banned so-called corrective surgeries on babies, which is basically a genital mutilation that is being done. It is being done in Ireland. I would like to get figures from the Minister on how often it has been done in this country.

I suppose we really have to listen to the testimonials. Numerous people have contacted us in support of this Bill since it was launched. I will read few of the messages communicated to us.

One person stated:

> I find getting healthcare, going to the dentist, really participating in society on a day-to-day basis difficult without recognition ... things as simple as not having options besides 'mr ms mrs' in being addressed ... to feeling safe to inform healthcare professionals of my gender identity because there's no legal basis for them ... I avoided going to get my first cervical check for over 5 years.

Another stated:

> ... we don't exist when it comes to trans healthcare and often doesn't ever mention [being] queer to any doctor for fear of stigma. I've had even the most progressive clinics asking for pronouns and then ignoring ... I am afraid of being out at work, so my social transition is limited ... The most important thing is there is no access to trans healthcare, unless one travels and has money.

The latter point is not dealt with in this Bill, which I absolutely acknowledge. This was about legal recognition first but those are huge issues as well.

Another person stated:

> As an intersex woman, I've spent much of my life living in a society that had no language for people like me. This Bill says that our lives deserve legal recognition too. It won't fix everything, but it is a step towards an Ireland where intersex people no longer have to argue that we exist. I genuinely believe that much of the physical, psychological and sexual abuse I experienced from childhood into adulthood was made possible by a society [and State not recognising us]

Ireland was one of 46 countries that signed up to intersex equal rights recognition last October but it has not actually done anything to bring it about. I do not believe any of the excuses that the Minister of State gave hold any water. On the great examination that the Department is doing, I will just refer to what is stated by the bodies that deal most with trans and intersex people. TENI, as others have mentioned, has referred to the progress that has been stalled for a decade. There is the matter of the cross-departmental review. In 2019, the then Minister for employment and social protection published a response to the call for proposals for change. No substantial progress has been made to implement the recommendations in the 2018 review.

For how long are trans, non-binary and intersex people going to have to wait for the Government to do a single thing? I urge people to campaign because the Establishment has never reacted unless brought under significant pressure. It is a really horrific ask of people who belong to such an oppressed minority to come out and have to campaign like this. The Government should just do it. The Minister of State heard the crap we had to listen to. It is not fair to ask people to take things on themselves when the Government should be doing it.

Question put.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): In accordance with Standing Order 85(2), the division is postponed until the weekly division time this evening.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 11.43 a.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar mheán lae.

Sitting suspended at 11.43 a.m. and resumed at 12 noon.

12 o'clock

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

An Ceann Comhairle: Before we proceed, I wish to remind Members of the standards expected in the Chamber. This House must be able to debate legislation and reach decisions. The Opposition has every right to challenge, object and oppose. Equally, every Member has the right to be heard without interruption. However strongly we disagree, we must respect one another's right to speak. That applies equally to both sides of this House. Members must make their case through the strength of their arguments within the time allocated, not through shouting, displaying placards or intimidating Members. Our constituents are best served by effective debate and respectful conduct. I expect both from every Member.

Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran: In fairness, this is the second or third time since I came into the House that the Ceann Comhairle has said that and no one has been punished.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy Moran-----

Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran: People should be punished for breaking the rules, not stand up and make lectures.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am on my feet, Deputy.

Deputy Réada Cronin: I agree. I think Micheál Martin should be punished.

An Ceann Comhairle: Excuse me. I have just made a statement that is relevant to every Member of the House. I mentioned "every Member". I ask the Deputy to respect what I said and respect the direction of the Chair-----

Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran: I hope Members respect the Ceann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: -----if we are to be effective in carrying out the business. I call Deputy Mary Lou McDonald.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Tá meas mór ag muintir na hÉireann ar ár neodracht. Ní féidir le Fianna Fáil nó Fine Gael fáil réidh leis an nglas triarach gan cead na ndaoine. Caithfear an cheist seo a chur faoi bhráid an phobail i reifreann. Today marks a very significant day for Ireland and our future. Today, the Government is bringing forward legislation to dismantle the triple lock. The consequences of the legislation, if passed, cannot be underestimated. The Government is tearing away current vital safeguards on the deployment of Irish troops overseas. It is clearing the way for this Government and future governments to send Irish troops into military operations without a UN mandate. Scrapping the triple lock opens the door to Ireland being dragged into EU military structures, dangerous alliances and further alignment with NATO. None of this is supported by the Irish people.

Deputy Máire Devine: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Yesterday, I put it to the Taoiseach that the Government's plan to abolish the triple lock and dismantle neutrality piece by piece flies in the face of our country's values of peace and peacekeeping, diplomacy, respect for international law and, crucially, independent Irish foreign policy, all of the things that allow Ireland to speak powerfully against war and for justice and human rights. The Taoiseach's response was to reach for theatrics and nonsense. It was a churlish response beneath the gravity and seriousness of this issue.

The Taoiseach has no mandate from the Irish people to dismantle our neutrality. He does not have the political or moral authority to overturn assurances previously given to the Irish people, and nor do his colleagues in Fine Gael or in Michael Lowry's group for that matter. He cannot simply airbrush commitments made by Fianna Fáil Governments to the Irish people on neutrality. Remember that the Irish people only passed the Nice and Lisbon treaties on the back of explicit guarantees that Irish neutrality would be protected. The triple lock was at the heart of that or, as the Taoiseach once put it, "at the core of our neutrality". I clearly remember Fianna Fáil Ministers and, indeed, a Fianna Fáil Taoiseach giving those commitments to the public, but now a Fianna Fáil Taoiseach and a Fianna Fáil-led Government seek to walk away from those commitments. The Taoiseach's approach is to downplay, dismiss and trivialise his shameful manoeuvring. The dishonesty is staggering.

This is not a technical issue. It is not a minor matter. We are talking about an enormous shift in foreign policy, one with far-reaching consequences for generations to come, yet debate is shut down, speaking time is guillotined and scrutiny is avoided. Above all else, the Government wants to rob the Irish people of their rightful place as custodians of our neutrality. How disgraceful. It is not for the Taoiseach, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael or the Government to decide the future of Irish neutrality. That is for the people to decide. They have a democratic duty to seek the people's permission. I put it to the Taoiseach again: ask this question in a referendum. Let the people of Ireland call this. Let the people vote on this because anything else is a profound betrayal by the Government.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Máire Devine: Well said.

The Taoiseach: Aontaím leis an Teachta go bhfuil meas mór ag muintir na hÉireann ar ár bpolasaí a bhaineann le neodracht na tíre. Tá an Rialtas taobh thiar den pholasaí sin. Níl sé ar intinn ag an Rialtas in aon chor athrú a dhéanamh ar neodracht na tíre. The Deputy's presentation of this issue is completely disingenuous and dishonest. Our reform of the triple lock is fundamentally about keeping alive the Irish tradition of peacekeeping and, indeed, keeping alive our capacity to have an independent foreign policy. In no way does it undermine Irish military neutrality. The Deputy, on the other hand, is essentially willing to abandon our proud tradition of peacekeeping. We are not. The only motivation here is to retain the capacity to participate in peacekeeping. The Deputy wants Russia, the United States and China to have the power of veto over whether Ireland ever again in the future participates in a peacekeeping mission. That is the essential difference. She has created false narrative after false narrative but the essential difference here is how we develop a capacity. We need to be honest with our military about this as well, including with soldiers and their families.

Deputy Máire Devine: Yes.

Deputy Paul Murphy: We do.

The Taoiseach: Let us not pretend that everything will be rosy in the garden if we just do not go through with reform of our legislation. It will not be. We know that because the ending of the UNIFIL mission is happening at the insistence of the United States to take away the Security Council's support for the work that Irish peacekeepers, and many other peacekeepers working with us, have been doing for many years in Lebanon, endeavouring to keep the peace there. I find it extraordinary, given Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Remember that Russia is on the Security Council. We have a member of the Security Council wilfully violating the UN Charter, committing terrible war crimes and bombing civilians and it is the Deputy's proposition that that country should have a veto on whether Irish peacekeepers enter into a peacekeeping mission. That is the stark choice facing us. That is what the Deputy is saying-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: Be honest.

The Taoiseach: -----that Russia will have the veto and our foreign policy-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: Please be honest with us.

The Taoiseach: -----will be dependent on Russia's say-so at the UN Security Council. The UN Security Council is no longer functioning. It is paralysed. The world is much more polarised by the hegemonic powers, by the US, Russia and China. We should retain-----

Deputy Rory Hearne: The Taoiseach is giving up on the UN.

The Taoiseach: No, I am not, but I am realistic about-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Without interruption, please.

The Taoiseach: -----the United Nations and the Security Council. What we are simply saying is that we need to reform that-----

Deputy Máire Devine: Ask the people.

The Taoiseach: -----if our military is to have any prospect of engagement in peacekeeping and assisting Irish citizens. We need to reform our legislation to make sure that, where our citizens are in crisis situations around the world, we can get more than 12 troops out to assist them.

We must also remember our role in Liberia and Chad. What was that role? That role was ensuring humanitarian aid to huge populations. We played a very noble role and Irish troops led that particular mission on behalf of many others. All we want to do is maintain peacekeeping. We are not joining NATO. We have no plans to join NATO. We have made that very clear. We are not part of any military alliance. Within the Constitution, there is a prohibition on mutual defence. This is a new concept that we must now have a referendum on an issue that does not involve any amendment, change, addition or deletion to the Irish Constitution. We have never had referendums bar those amending, deleting or adding to the Constitution.

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

The Taoiseach: The Deputy seems to now be undermining-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The allocated time is up, Taoiseach. I call Deputy McDonald.

The Taoiseach: -----the whole process of parliamentary democracy.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The triple lock has been described here in the Dáil, in this democratic place, by a Fianna Fáil Taoiseach as the ultimate, legally binding guarantee of Ireland's sovereign military neutrality.

That is the fact of the matter. The necessity for a UN mandate is essential to ensure our compliance with international law and to ensure that our actions are absolutely consistent as a non-aligned, neutral State. Those are the facts of the matter. The Taoiseach reaches for Russia. He could reach for others because the Russians are not on their own in violating international law and dismissing the UN system. He reaches for the fact that we need UN reform, which I agree with, as a pretext and camouflage to ditch Irish neutrality. He is wrong to do that. That is a shameful position. Let me put it to the Taoiseach again - we can debate this here - that the core of the position is this-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you Deputy, your time is up.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Irish people get to call Irish neutrality. The Taoiseach gave them assurances to get Lisbon and Nice passed.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: He offered up the triple lock as the guarantee mechanism. Now he wants to take it away.

An Ceann Comhairle: Respectfully, Deputy, your time is up. The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: He cannot do that without asking the people's permission.

The Taoiseach: For over 60 years now, you-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I am not 60.

The Taoiseach: -----as in the Sinn Féin Party, the left-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I just want to put that on the record.

The Taoiseach: I am talking about the Sinn Féin Party, the left and the far left, which for over 60 years have said neutrality was dead. In 1972 when we had a referendum on entering the European Union-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We said you were killing it.

The Taoiseach: Stop. Go back over the manifestos-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That is very different.

The Taoiseach: They declared that neutrality is over. They declared that it was going to be over in 2003, 2008 and ever since.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Then we got the triple lock.

The Taoiseach: Neutrality was not dead.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We said the Government was killing it. That is very different.

An Ceann Comhairle: Do not be so disrespectful.

The Taoiseach: Neutrality was not dead. They kept, decade after decade, trotting out this line about a military European Union complex, that we would be part of a European army and that our neutrality was dead in the water.

Deputy Paul Murphy: So we got the Seville declaration. That was great, was it not? The Government is tearing it up.

The Taoiseach: All of it has been proven to date to have been false assertions and false narratives and they are doing the same here. I did not just reach for Russia. I said earlier that the United States has essentially stopped the UNIFIL mission-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: What about Israel?

An Ceann Comhairle: The time is up.

The Taoiseach: -----in Lebanon.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Israel.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Cian O'Callaghan.

The Taoiseach: The United States is on the Security Council. Israel is not.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I am aware of that.

An Ceann Comhairle: Are you going to stand, Deputy O'Callaghan?

The Taoiseach: The United States is on it. Let us argue the facts.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I am arguing the facts.

An Ceann Comhairle: Taoiseach, Deputy O'Callaghan is now on his feet.

The Taoiseach: The fundamental point is that they want to end peacekeeping but we want to keep it going.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, your time is up. I have called Deputy O'Callaghan.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: The treatment of vulnerable children in the care of the State is an ongoing horror and scandal. Yesterday *The Irish Times* reported from the High Court on the shocking cases of three of these children. A 14-year-old girl who has mild learning difficulties is being subjected to horrific sexual exploitation by multiple men. The girl has been

approached by men who gave her alcohol, cocaine and other drugs. Tusla and the Government are fully aware of the depraved sexual abuse of this girl, which is happening because Tusla is unable to provide her with a bed in a special care unit. She is 14 years old. Another girl is also currently being sexually exploited by a large number of men. She has been seen on social media distressed and under the influence of drugs. Again, this girl is also in State care where she is supposed to be protected and cared for. Instead, she is being subjected to vile and disgusting sexual abuse. Tusla and the Government are fully aware that this is happening and are effectively saying they cannot do anything about it. Another child, a 16-year-old boy, is involved in criminality and is taking and selling drugs. He was holding large quantities of heroin and crack cocaine for older men. Gardaí have now seized these drugs and he is in very serious danger. Again, there is no special care place available for this vulnerable boy.

The Taoiseach told my Social Democrats colleague, Deputy Quaide, yesterday that nearly half of the State's 26 special care beds remain closed because of staffing shortages. Those staffing shortages have existed since 2018, for eight years. There has never been a time when all 26 beds have been open. How many children have been failed by the State during all of those years? How many children have gotten hooked on drugs, been pulled into criminality, or been sexually exploited and raped? Successive Governments have tolerated this abject failure of children that the State is supposed to protect. An article in *The Irish Times* today reports that Tusla's new plan to tackle this crisis is to reduce the number of children it takes into special care. This is a shocking approach to take. What is happening on this Government's watch is an outrage and the current approach to addressing it is not working. It has not worked for the last eight years. It is not acceptable to use staffing shortages as an excuse. Children are being failed and the Government must act. What is the Taoiseach going to do to protect them? Does he agree with the Tusla plan to reduce the number of children it takes into special care?

The Taoiseach: First of all, as I said yesterday, the case of the young girl referred to in yesterday's reports is deeply serious and extremely worrying. We are engaging across government with the Minister, Deputy Foley, on this specific case and other special care cases, some of which Deputy O'Callaghan has raised. We will do everything we possibly can to protect vulnerable children. Those men and people who are exploiting children need to be pursued rigorously also and brought to justice.

There is an enormous increase in demand on child protection and welfare services. It is not an excuse but there are very significant issues in terms of recruitment and retention of special care workers. In 2025 alone there was a 10% increase in referrals and they increased by a further 11% in the first quarter of 2026. Referrals have more than doubled since 2014. We have responded with sustained investment so it is not a resources issue. We have increased Tusla's budget to about €1.4 billion in 2027 and have expanded overall staffing by over 343.

The special care area serves to protect and engage with a very small cohort of young people with the most acute and complex needs. Those settings require exceptionally high staffing ratios and specialist expertise. There has to be at least one staff member per child throughout the day, in addition to supervisory staff and the units obviously have to be covered on a 24-7 basis. That means seven individuals for every one young person. Children with particularly complex needs may require up to twice that level of staffing, or 14 staff to one individual child or young person. Currently, 15 of the 26 special care beds are staffed. The complexity of these cases is why Tusla has focused on workforce reform in the last number of years. Changes have

occurred in an effort to increase staff numbers in terms of grading and so on. I will not go into the detail of that now. The changes are significant enough in terms of dealing with the recruitment issue and are delivering results. Tusla has successfully filled five new social care manager posts, two deputy social care manager posts and 20 special care worker roles as of September. We also have to create stronger care pathways so that young people can transition to more appropriate settings when ready, helping to maximise the use of special care capacity. Two new step-down units will open by the end of this year, with a third opening in early 2027.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: I asked whether the Taoiseach agrees with the Tusla plan to actually reduce the number of children taken into special care. Does he think that is an appropriate response, not to meet the need that is there and not to provide a sufficient level of staffing? What are his thoughts on that and what specifically is he going to do about this? These shortages have been going on for eight years. There have been at least nine High Court judgments on this issue over those eight years calling out the lack of response from the State. It is not acceptable. On staffing shortages, I am sure there are challenges but they need to be addressed. The Government and the Taoiseach need to ensure that those staffing shortages are addressed so that children in these dire situations get the care that they need. It is not acceptable to say that this is difficult and it is not getting addressed. We have had eight years of successive Governments not tackling this. What specifically is the Taoiseach going to do to fix this? What is his view on Tusla's plan to reduce the number of special care places?

The Taoiseach: I do not agree that nothing has been done over the last number of years. The services have expanded. I just want to make the point, and I say this in the most objective sense, that we need to be careful around the interaction of the courts, the Oireachtas, the Government and proper policy. Policy resides in here. What I mean by that is that over three decades we have been deinstitutionalising care.

That is the fundamental direction of travel that I think everyone in the House agrees with. That does not mean we do not have institutionalisation. We do, in this case for specific care needs of children. I remember being Minister for Health and Children in the early 2000s when many court orders came in threatening jail for Ministers. What was coming to us was directly contrary to the policy position outlined by a unit in the Department at that time.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: Does the Taoiseach agree that these children need special care?

The Taoiseach: Will the Deputy hear my point? We need to be mindful of that. I fully accept the judge's decision. I have no issue with sending the details to the Minister. That is fine. We need to be careful that we protect the overall policy idea of not institutionalising every issue pertaining to children.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I will do a rare thing this afternoon and pay the Taoiseach two compliments on housing. It may not be a surprise that both come with qualifications. Last week I was glad to join new Labour Party councillors Peter O'Brien, Martha Fanning and others for the turning of the sod at Dún Brí in Dundrum. The Land Development Agency, LDA, and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council will deliver 934 new homes at the site of the former Central Mental Hospital. It is really welcome to see the LDA beginning to deliver. However,

we now need it delivering at even greater scale. Turning the sod is one thing, but a family turning the key in the door of their own home is another.

Speaking of turning the key, I have a second compliment. The Labour Party welcomes the housing Minister's plans to end turnkey acquisitions for social housing by the end of next year. For far too long, the State has pumped public money into buying turnkey units from private developers while failing to build our own State capacity to deliver homes. It means the Government has been giving developers tax breaks, selling them public land at a discount and then acquiring those homes back at a premium. It makes no sense and is bad value for money. As the Labour Party has said for years, the private market cannot be relied on to deliver the homes people need at the scale needed. We know this, with almost 6,000 children homeless. That is why the Labour Party has proposed a State construction company along the lines of the National Building Agency established by Seán Lemass and Fianna Fáil in the 1960s. The principle is the same. The State must build homes directly and at scale. While we welcome the ending of turnkey acquisitions, we are concerned that social housing delivery will fall off a cliff after 2028 when the new policy comes into effect. That is why we are saying the Government must effectively resource the LDA and councils to build the necessary homes. The problem is that people now lack trust in the Government's capacity to deliver homes. Its 2024 election campaign was predicated on a false premise. It delivered 10,000 fewer homes that year than it promised. It also unfortunately has form on half-baked and half-abandoned gimmicks like the housing tsar, the apartment standards U-turn and, of course, the notorious "beds in sheds", as they were christened by the Labour Party housing spokesperson, Conor Sheehan.

The Government's promises on social housing are no different. Take the former Irish Glass Bottle site in Ringsend in my constituency. After long negotiations, a deal was struck in 2017 to provide 900 social and affordable homes. A decade on, we see the developer reneging on the commitment to deliver any affordable purchase homes, robbing local people of the chance to own their own home. To add insult to injury, Simon Coveney, the former housing Minister who brokered the deal, has taken up a lobbying job for the developer Johnny Ronan. You could not make it up. It is a question of trust. How can the Taoiseach reassure communities of his Government's capacity to build homes? How can he guarantee the delivery of social housing will not fall off a cliff in 2028?

The Taoiseach: I welcome the Deputy's contribution in respect of the 1,000 new units in Dundrum. She was at the event last week. It is a real demonstration of momentum in house building and of the role of the Land Development Agency. I do not believe we need two national building agencies. We have the LDA. We do not need a new national construction agency alongside it, which the Deputy seems to be proposing.

I will make a point on social housing because I have heard a lot of commentary. Even this morning, somebody said that only 9,000 were built last year. Since 2020, close to 60,000 social homes have been added by this Government and the previous Government to the social housing stock. In the previous five years it was 34,500. That is the level of momentum on social housing that has occurred in the past five years. That needs to be acknowledged. There has been a consistent commitment to social housing since 2020 that outstrips anything done in the past two decades. We are now the fastest in Europe on completions *per capita* in house construction. We are completing approximately 7.2 units per 1,000 of the population. That is

from Euroconstruct. We are more than double the European average of three units and triple the United Kingdom average of 2.4 units. Completions rose by 40% between 2022 and 2026. Ireland was one of only five European countries where output grew while it declined overall on the Continent. Between July 2020 and now, we have delivered in excess of 180,000 houses. We need to do far more. We acknowledge that.

I know the Deputy has poured scorn on some of the initiatives. We are doing everything we can legislatively, and through the Housing Activation Office, the Critical Infrastructure Bill and enabling important investment in infrastructure, particularly water and the grid, to enable more housing to be built. There is also public transport that will unblock and facilitate substantially more social and affordable housing.

I think the Deputy welcomed the decision on turnkey. We are endeavouring to transition to get a more sustainable market in house construction for the coming decade. The Minister made it clear this morning that we will continue to work with the local authorities. The local authorities will still be in a position to work with builders with a view to building houses they can contract and finance. What we are doing in the context of the turnkey decision is making sure that individual purchasers using the first home or help to buy schemes will not be squeezed out of it by the local authority buying an entire estate. That is a good reform. We have to put pressure on some local authorities to get back to house building. Some have been far better than others in respect of building social housing in their areas.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: The Labour Party's policy is to transform the Land Development Agency into a State construction company, not to create a new entity. The Taoiseach always wilfully misunderstands that. I heard nothing from him in his response about the effective resourcing of the LDA and local authorities to ensure they have capacity to deliver once the policy of buying turnkey homes has ended. I am putting the Taoiseach on notice that he has one year to effectively resource the LDA and councils. Otherwise, the capacity of the State to build homes at scale will be a major issue in the run-up to the next elections in 2029. On Saturday I addressed the conference of the Connect Trade Union, the union for craftworkers. They were clear with me that in order to end the housing disaster, the Government needs to resource and create viable apprenticeship pipelines and invest in public capacity. When he was making the turnkey announcement this week, it was unfortunate to see the Minister, Deputy Browne, getting a dig in to local authorities. I notice the Taoiseach did it himself a moment ago. The Minister blamed them for not stepping up to the mark on house building. However, if they are not adequately funded and resourced with the necessary staffing capacity, the local authorities will be unable to deliver at the scale needed once the buying of turnkey homes is at an end.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is your allocated time, Deputy.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: We are putting the Taoiseach on notice on this.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, that is your allocated time finished.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: It is a critical issue for all of those who cannot afford to buy or rent their own home.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach, please.

The Taoiseach: We are resourcing at an unprecedented scale. I mean, 80% of every house built in this country now has State backing, one way or the other. Some €9 billion has been provided in the budget. Of that €9 billion, €3 billion is to deliver 12,000 new social homes in the budget 2027 allocation. The total Exchequer funding available in 2027 for housing is approximately €7.7 billion, comprising approximately €5 billion in capital and €2 billion in current. The investment in the LDA is additional and will complement that. Lending from the Housing Finance Agency will bring the total to approximately €9.1 billion. There are huge resources going into this, and they will continue to go into this. On the other side, the help to buy and first home schemes are doing a lot for first-time buyers. The percentage of first-time buyers drawing down mortgages is increasing on an ongoing basis. We are not scapegoating local authorities, but the reality is that some have done far better than others in terms of housing. That is just the reality.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Yesterday in his defence of the abolition of the triple lock, the Taoiseach asked, "Who is going to engage in military adventurism? Does Deputy McDonald think Dáil Éireann is?". Does he think people have no memory at all? In 2003 I was one of more than 100,000 people marching against the US invasion of Iraq. The Taoiseach was a Minister in a Government that facilitated that illegal and imperialist invasion.

They agreed to allow US troops to use Shannon Airport on their way to this adventure - an adventure that killed hundreds of thousands of people. A top civil servant told the defence committee that if the triple lock had not been in place, the Government could legally have sent Irish troops to participate in that invasion.

The Taoiseach was correct when he said that the triple lock is at the core of our neutrality. Why? Because it is the only thing that legally ensures that the Government can only send troops abroad to peacekeeping missions. That is what this debate is about.

The Taoiseach has misrepresented the position again and again today and yesterday. He presents it as reforming the triple lock. That is what the Taoiseach has an electoral mandate for, "protect and promote Ireland's military neutrality including sensible reform of the 'Triple Lock' legislation.", but can he be honest today and tell us he is not reforming the triple lock and that he is abolishing it? The civil servant at the Department of Defence at the committee said, "You could call it a removal of the triple lock" so stop misleading people. In the Government's legislation, is it not the case that there are only two locks left - the Government and the Dáil - and the Government, by definition, has majority support in the Dáil so it is really no lock at all?

Today again, the Taoiseach spoke about getting rid of the triple lock in order to "keep alive the ... tradition of peacekeeping." That is not true either, is it? The Government's Bill states, "a relevant international force operates for the purpose of peace-keeping, peace-enforcement or conflict prevention". Can the Taoiseach explain to the public what peace enforcement is? It is explicitly not peace-keeping, is it not? Peace enforcement is different because it operates without the consent of the parties involved. The Government's Bill will involve Irish soldiers

in illegal wars with no UN mandate in conflicts. It is explicitly the purpose. If it were not the purpose, the Government would not have the word "peace-enforcement" there.

Can the Taoiseach accept as well the fact, agreed to by the Department's officials at the defence committee, that any other regional arrangement includes NATO and any potential coalition of the willing? What this is about is freeing the Government's hand and the hands of future Irish governments to send Irish troops to fight in illegal wars wherever they want. The Government should tell the people where he wants to send our troops. Does the Government want to send them to Ukraine to engage in a war with Russia or does it want to send them to Lebanon as part of the EU's mission to strengthen the Lebanese armed forces to fight against Hezbollah?

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Taoiseach asked why should there be a referendum on this.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Why? Because people already voted on it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Your allocated time is up.

Deputy Paul Murphy: They were promised this. It is in the Seville Declaration. On this basis, they voted.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, are you unable to conform with the direction of the Chair?

Deputy Paul Murphy: If you are going to get rid of it, it needs to be put to the people. It is not the Taoiseach's decision.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach will respond.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy's presentation, in my view, is completely disingenuous. I note his inability to observe and articulate the fact that what in essence he was saying is that Ireland should depend on the say so and the agreement of Russia, a state that has violated the UN Charter in a most egregious way, killing innocent civilians, behaving like a rogue state.

Deputy Paul Donnelly: Talk about Ireland.

The Taoiseach: In essence, what Deputy Murphy is saying is we cannot participate in any peacekeeping mission from hereon unless a state such as Russia, the United States or China, agrees, particularly Russia because Russia has broken all rules under the UN Charter.

A Deputy: So has America.

The Taoiseach: In terms of peacekeeping and peace enforcement, there have been peace enforcement missions under the UN. The Deputy knows that, so why did he deliberately create a false narrative there to suggest that this was the Bill?

Deputy Paul Murphy: Because it is not about peacekeeping.

The Taoiseach: No. The Bill is, in essence, in terms of what already exists in terms of peacekeeping and peace enforcement. We have been on different missions, ever since we started in the 1960s getting involved in peacekeeping. The Deputy knows that very well.

It would be for the Government or the Dáil in terms of deciding what peacekeeping missions we would become involved in. We are not a military power. Let us get rid of all this nonsense.

Ireland is not going to be participating in a war. We do not have the capacity to participate in a war. We are very good at peacekeeping-----

Deputy Noel Grealish: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: -----particularly good at it, and recognised internationally. That is all we want to continue with.

When I have been out in Lebanon, I have talked to our soldiers. I talk to our navy. They feel fulfilment in their military careers, particularly when things were very difficult during the attack on Lebanon by Israel. When I went out there, I said that it must have been particularly tense and difficult. They said, "This is what we are trained for."

People who join our military understand fully the importance of peacekeeping and the impact it has on neighbourhoods and communities that benefit from peacekeeping but if I take the Deputy's direction of travel, the opportunities for peacekeeping will be very limited in the years ahead if we continue with the current system where, essentially, the United States has forced the ending of UNIFIL in Lebanon and Russia, because of its geopolitical issues, will not sanction peace missions in particular parts of the world because it would prefer the Wagner Group to be involved. Russia would prefer its own mercenaries to be involved to extract minerals from many African states. Let us look at what is happening in the Sahel. We need to have an honest conversation about this-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: Like Trump wants one.

The Taoiseach: -----but the Deputy's defence of Russia and all of this in terms of them being the decision-makers-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Taoiseach. Your time is up. The Deputy will now respond and you can come back in.

The Taoiseach: -----in terms of where do we get the law in peacekeeping is now erroneous. It has no substantive basis anymore because of the behaviour of Russia-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Taoiseach, the time allocated is up.

The Taoiseach: -----in terms of how it is behaving across the world, and others.

Deputy Paul Murphy: This use of Russia and China to justify Ireland preparing to break international law is nothing new. Let me quote from a Dáil debate in 2013:

> It appears that Fine Gael is arguing that Ireland is failing in its European responsibilities and is allowing Russia and China to have a veto over our peacekeeping activities. This is nothing more than an out-of-touch ideological obsession on the part of Fine Gael which ignores the facts of Ireland's international standing.

That was a certain Deputy Micheál Martin. The Taoiseach was correct then. The problem is he has adopted the same ideological obsession.

Let us get down to facts and let us be honest. Does the Taoiseach want to send Irish troops to participate in a European mission in Lebanon? Is that what the Taoiseach wants to do? Let us be honest about that because Kaja Kallas is clear. The EU is not seeking to replace UNIFIL. It is not a continuation of UNIFIL. Instead, it is a mission "to strengthen the Lebanese armed forces and the ability of the Lebanese state to provide security." It is a war internal to Lebanon against Hezbollah, and the Taoiseach wants Irish troops to participate in that. All the triple lock does-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Paul Murphy: -----is say we can only send troops within the framework of international law.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you. Your point is made, Deputy, in the allocated time.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Taoiseach want to get away from international law. International law says peacekeeping only exists when the UN agrees to it. That is what international law says. That is not just the triple lock. The Taoiseach wants to get rid of it because he-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, your time is up. I am going to continuously talk over you until you accept the direction of the Chair.

Deputy Paul Murphy: -----want Irish troops to participate in illegal wars and the Taoiseach had better tell us which wars those are.

The Taoiseach: We do not want to participate. By the way, there is no one breaking any law here. How dare the Deputy suggest that we want to break international law?

Deputy Paul Murphy: Why else would you get rid of the triple lock?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, respectfully allow a response.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The triple lock enshrines international law in domestic legislation. That is all it does.

The Taoiseach: Under the existing peace missions we have been on in Lebanon, Hezbollah have murdered a number of Irish soldiers. The Deputy did not say that. Under the existing peace missions, only very recently, there was the appalling murder of Seán Rooney by Hezbollah, and he was not the first killed by various groupings there. I condemn Hezbollah for what it does and for how it has been undermining Lebanon for so long.

Training other armies, soldiers, etc., is something Ireland has been doing for a long time, and de-mining, for example, or medevac and so on. We want to create options. We are not definitively saying one or the other. We certainly do not want to be involved in wars. That is not our function. It is wrong to suggest that it is.

Teachtaireacht ón Seanad - Message from Seanad

An Ceann Comhairle: Seanad Éireann has passed the Employment Equality and Institutional Burials (Amendment) Bill 2026, without amendment.

Ceisteanna ó na Comhaltaí Eile - Other Members' Questions

Deputy Michael Lowry: This is a question for the Taoiseach or the Minister for Health. I attended a briefing on Monday delivered by the HSE mid-west management team. The briefing outlined the challenges facing University Hospital Limerick, UHL, this winter, the progress made and the support required to ensure patient safety. The message was forthright, clear and disturbing.

However, it is important to acknowledge that progress has been achieved. There have been a 10% increase in emergency department attendances and 2,000 additional admissions to UHL compared with the same period last year. Department of Health figures also show that UHL's overall activity and output has increased by 36% in recent years. With the encouragement of the Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, governance and oversight have improved, with stronger executive accountability and enhanced clinical management structures. Output and delivery across care services have increased and improved.

This reflects the commitment and professionalism of staff and management. However, I want to be equally clear about the stark reality facing us this winter. Improved performance cannot compensate for inadequate hospital capacity and a specialist workforce that remains below what is required to meet demand. Demand has escalated sharply. Emergency department attendance records have again broken records. There is an extraordinary level of demand on a hospital under sustained pressure and in crisis.

The regional executive has identified measures required this winter and sought the funding and support to implement them. Given the exceptional circumstances facing the mid-west region, I ask that this funding and support be made available. The response must match the urgency of the situation. We were also briefed that to provide resilience within the hospital

system over the winter, day surgery and scheduled care at Nenagh, Ennis and Croom hospitals will be severely curtailed. Currently, management's only solution is to reallocate existing resources at the expense of selected services. The availability of consulting staff is a critical issue. The mid-west has 80 fewer consultants compared with the average across other regions.

I welcome the establishment of the Mid West Health Planning Board and the acknowledgement that the region's healthcare capacity deficit has to be addressed. However, we need to be clear about what the board has been tasked with delivering. A regional healthcare map is not the same as a specific mandate to plan a new hospital. Following HIQA's review and its recommendations, the people of north Tipperary and the mid-west are entitled to clarity about the intended outcome. Are we going to get a model 4 hospital on the new site at Raheen? Is the Government committed to delivering that hospital and the additional capacity and staffing to address the deficit identified by HIQA? Our health staff are doing extraordinary work and the progress achieved is tangible. However, staff cannot compensate for inadequate infrastructure and insufficient specialist staffing.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising a very serious and important issue, particularly for those in the mid-west in terms of health services at University Hospital Limerick. I commend all the staff and all who work at all hospitals in the mid-west, including UHL, on the work they do. It is true that UHL is one of the busiest emergency departments in the country, with presentations totalling 95,000-plus in 2025, which was the busiest year to date. Demand remains exceptionally high, with attendances increasing by 8.4% between January and September. A lot of good work has been done to deal with those increasing pressures. Parallel with that, the Government has prioritised investment in the mid-west, and the Deputy has acknowledged the progress. We recognise that more is required.

The Deputy knows about the completion of the first 96-bed block and that the contract has been signed for a second 96-bed block. That is happening right now. There is also the delivery of two 16-bed rapid-build units. Innovative alternative care pathways are reducing pressure on UHL, including a 40-bed virtual ward, the phased opening of the Limerick surgical hub and over 53,000 attendances at injury units at St. John's in Ennis and Nenagh Hospital during 2025.

It is interesting. Funding for the hospitals has more than doubled from about €370 million in 2019 to €763 million in 2025. We then add to that the €317 million in capital investment between 2020 and 2025 so, by any yardstick, the increased investment has been very significant. Equally, there has been a significant expansion in the workforce. The number of staff at University Hospital Limerick has gone up by 46% since 2020, growing by thousands up to 4,568 now, with more doctors, nurses, midwives and so on. Therefore, both on the human resource side and the capital side, there have been significant investments.

We had the HIQA review of safety and the design and delivery of urgent and emergency healthcare services in the mid-west, and we now have the board. That is important. A site has been bought. What is that saying? I think the board has had two meetings. What I would advise, and I think it is important, is that the integrity of the board needs to be maintained. If a board is established, that board should get on with its job in terms of its remit and a proper blueprint for the region into the future, based on the recommendations and the options in that HIQA report, which the Government has agreed with. I am not comfortable with details being

articulated after two minutes. The board needs to get on with its work and have the capacity to do that.

Deputy Michael Lowry: We have been promised the new hospital, and it is essential that it happens.

I want to ask the Taoiseach and the Minister about the winter surge and the package of support. Have we got a package and is the staffing ready? In the context of the winter surge, can the Department revisit the proposal to take control of the Raheen Lodge care unit in Mungret for the duration of the winter? This unit is operated by Bartra Healthcare and it is a state-of-the-art facility. It provides step-down and convalescent beds for 80 single-occupancy ensuite rooms. It is a brand-new facility. It is fully staffed but it is currently unoccupied. It is available to the HSE. Negotiations should start immediately to get this centre up and running within the HSE. I consider it to be a necessary and logical step to alleviate the pressure on UHL.

The people of the mid-west need to know that regional service planning will proceed in parallel with the development of a new hospital at Raheen.

The Taoiseach: A winter plan has been developed with the region. I understand there was a recent conference in the royal college with all the regions to work through a winter plan to deal with the winter surge.

On the procurement of additional beds, in order to develop a greater sense of efficiency and value for money for the State, a national tender competition was entered into recently, and a bespoke national panel arrangement has been established for the provision of short-stay therapeutic beds. My understanding is that the HSE has confirmed that the beds referred to by the Deputy are included in the new tender process. It is on the new panel of providers as a result of this tender.

The allocation to the mid-west will, in the first instance, increase to 55 beds on a phased basis, with an opportunity to increase that again in early 2027 to support the region to deal with demand over the winter period. A national tendering process was entered into for procurement for these short-term therapeutic beds. That is probably a more structured way to deal with issues as opposed to-----

An Ceann Comhairle: That concludes questions from other Members. Before I move to Questions on Policy or Legislation, I would like to welcome to the Dáil Councillor Mick McCarthy and friends, who are here today from Freshford, County Kilkenny, at the behest of Deputy 'Chap' Cleere. They are most welcome.

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

Deputy Thomas Gould: I was listening to "Morning Ireland" this morning, and I encourage everyone to listen back to it. From it, I learned that the Minister for housing does not believe in housing targets. He does not believe in housing forecasts. I always knew he did not believe in delivering affordable housing. What I also heard is that he went on to describe the increase

in house prices as "a little thing". How arrogant can he be to describe it like that? They are his words. I ask the Taoiseach to listen back. House prices have gone up by €200,000. They have doubled under the Government's watch in the past ten years. Maybe that is a little thing for Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and all their buddies with loads of money, but for all the hard-working people, it is not a little thing. Does the Taoiseach agree with the Minister for housing or does he believe that €200,000, and the doubling of house prices in ten years, is a little thing?

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

The Taoiseach: I listened to the interview as well, so I do not have to. I thought it was a very calm but determined presentation by the Minister.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Did you?

The Taoiseach: I did, actually, particularly in terms of the achievements in social housing, which the Deputy ignored. I mean, 60,000 social houses in the past five years is no mean thing. It is a significant, dramatic change from what we were doing previously. Close to 60,000 social houses have been built since 2020, and that takes in the Covid period as well.

Deputy Thomas Gould: House prices have doubled.

An Ceann Comhairle: I cannot command the answer but I can ask the Deputy to stop interrupting.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is endeavouring to undermine the sincerity-----

Deputy Thomas Gould: I asked a straightforward question.

The Taoiseach: Irrespective of his political view, he should acknowledge the integrity, sincerity and commitment of the Minister to increase housing supply, which was clearly what he said throughout that interview. Supply, supply, supply, and I really want the Deputy's support when it comes to various projects.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Is the doubling of house prices a little thing? That is the question I asked. I did not get an answer.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Rice is on his feet. Please have respect for Deputy Rice.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: I again raise the issue of healthcare workers with long Covid whose payments are about to be cut off and who have been repeatedly failed by the State. As the Taoiseach knows, I raised this previously and I wrote to him about this. This is a small group of workers who got Covid at the peak of the pandemic and have debilitating symptoms which mean they cannot return to work. The special scheme ended on 31 January. It was extended for some people on sick leave, but payments been cut off today for some of those people. The

Government is going to plunge them into poverty. Two women drove from Laois to Cork to meet me recently. Rose got Covid during the meaningful Christmas. She is a single parent living at home with her child. Her mortgage is €800 a month. She is now going to be on a social welfare payment of €254 per week. She is worried about losing her house, Taoiseach. She said that she went from the front line to the bread line. These are decisions that the Taoiseach and his Government are making. We urgently need a permanent solution here for these workers who served the State so well.

The Taoiseach: I have responded on a number of occasions and I have met with survivors of long Covid. We have responded at every juncture, as the Deputy has kind of acknowledged there. This issue has been through the WRC, as the Deputy knows. It is not as if consideration has not been given to the issue. I have met trade unions in respect of this. We will continue to keep the matter under review, but it is not simple.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: The people of Ukraine have endured nearly five years of Putin's brutal war of aggression, and I know the Taoiseach spoke on it earlier today. They deserve our unwavering solidarity, particularly with the growing hostility being shown to President Zelenskyy by US President Trump. It is terrifying that lives in Ukraine are so dependent on Trump's volatile temper. At a time when our solidarity is needed more than ever with the people of Ukraine, Ireland cannot be silent or complicit for that matter. That brings me to the question of Aughinish Alumina, which I have raised before in this House. In July, the Minister, Deputy Burke, announced that his Department's review into the exports to Russia from that plant had been completed and sent to the European Commission. We saw a summary of that report, but we have not seen the full report. We know that the Government is likely to face increasing pressure at EU level over coming months over what appears to be a light touch on Aughinish. Will the Taoiseach condemn Trump's approach to Ukraine, in particular his lifting of sanctions on Russia? Where is the report? Will the Taoiseach publish it in full? Can we be sure that Irish-produced materials are not being used to fuel Russia's war machine?

The Taoiseach: I discussed the recent issues along with others with President Zelenskyy on Friday. I welcome the Deputy raising this issue because, to be fair, she is correct that Ukraine deserves our unwavering solidarity and support. I was extremely disappointed when the Sinn Féin Party and others, not Labour, opposed the €90 billion financial support to Ukraine that the EU decided on. Sinn Féin said that we were wrong to support that. If that funding does not go to Ukraine, it will be completely defenceless, so we have responsibilities too. On the Aughinish Alumina question, the fundamental issue is the supply chain into Europe itself. Where does Europe lie, particularly in the supply of product from Aughinish to France and to Sweden? I will talk to the Minister in respect of the full report and what he can make available to the Deputy. The bigger issue with the USA was the Starshield and Starlink issue. I think Ukraine has engaged again with the USA to try to maintain a consistency of support on that front.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Last week, a grieving mother and formidable online safety campaigner visited Leinster House. Maria Raine is campaigning for stronger regulation of AI chatbots after ChatGPT drove her beloved 16-year-old son, Adam, to take his own life. ChatGPT advised him on suicide techniques, encouraged him to drink alcohol so that he would go through with it, and isolated him from his family. It told him not to talk to his mother or his

brother. It said no one understood him like it did. In Ireland, more than half of eight- to 12-year-olds and over three quarters of 12- to 15-year-olds use AI. Some 16% of eight- to 12-year-olds and 20% of 12- to 15-year-olds use AI chatbots to chat or get advice rather than look up information, but the boundary between these is blurred. Adam began using ChatGPT for homework and ended with it writing his suicide note. Maria believes, and I agree, that AI chatbots should be banned from discussing mental health with children. Does the Taoiseach agree and will he introduce legislation to prevent ChatGPT from killing any kids in Ireland?

The Taoiseach: It is a shocking situation and our heart goes out to the family. We support restrictions, particularly at a European Union level. President von der Leyen, in her recent state of the Union address, announced that the Commission will publish a proposal in respect of restrictions on access to social media for children. An EU-wide report would have far greater impact with regard to enforceability and protecting children than just one member state by another member state, because the services are cross-border. I am in favour of everything that we can do to protect children. The legislation at the European level will be known as the European Union Kids Act. It will take a graduated, differentiated approach to age restrictions. There will also be new obligations on platforms to design safe services in line with what the Deputy is saying, that are safe for minors and for children in particular.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I have raised this multiple times and am flagging it with the Taoiseach again. New figures from EirGrid show that more than 13% of available wind and solar electricity could not be used in the first nine months of this year. That is enough energy to power almost 500,000 homes. It is concerning that we are losing vast amounts of clean, renewable energy because our grid and storage capabilities are not up to pace. At a time when households face high electricity costs and data centres are increasing our dependence on gas, which sets the price, Ireland is exposed to imported fossil fuels. It is a missed opportunity. We need urgent investment in battery storage and green hydrogen conversion and greater system flexibility and we are doing it too slowly. Can the Taoiseach give a commitment that we are going to increase our efforts to be more self-sufficient?

The Taoiseach: I can indeed. The day before yesterday, at the Cabinet sub-committee, we met EirGrid. We discussed the €18 billion investment to 2030 to enhance the capacity of the grid, which is important, but also storage. We have had some good developments, particularly in the midlands, on battery storage and so forth, but we have to move at pace. I get frustrated that some of the renewable projects are still with An Coimisiún Pleanála, for example. We have an energy crisis. Our dependency on fossil fuels creates unreliability in energy supply that is really problematic. Anything we can do to make sure that we optimise the energy generated by renewables and do not lose it is something that we are focused on. The discussion at the Cabinet sub-committee was looking beyond 2030 as well, at further investments to expand the grid. I certainly do not disagree with what Deputy Gogarty is saying.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I want to ask the Minister for Health about the National Orthopaedic Hospital, which is located in my constituency, but based on the number of parliamentary questions, one can see it is used by constituents right across the country. In recent months, the hospital has been informing constituents that their waiting time for orthopaedic surgeries has increased because of a change in funding to the hospital. As a

member of the Committee of Public Accounts, I know the end of insourcing by the Minister was a positive measure because it was not giving good value for money for what the taxpayer was investing in our hospitals. Can the Minister ensure that those people waiting on the waiting list will get access to the orthopaedic surgeries that they need?

Minister for Health (Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill): The Deputy is quite right. Insourcing was a wrong use of public funds and created the wrong incentives. There has been significant investment in Cappagh hospital in recent years. Its budget has gone from €41 million to €63 million over the past five years. Staffing has increased by 130 in the same period. There is very significant investment but it is also true to say that as we build surgical hubs and other elective capacity, the State will not be using national treatment purchase fund, NTPF, funding to purchase that in the private market. It is appropriate that we wind down the NTPF budget in that way because we have invested in other elective capacity.

Deputy John Clendennen: The town of Birr has a population of 5,000. We have had nine outages across the town this year so far. Right now, Uisce Éireann has nine outages right across the town.

1 o'clock

These are lasting for two, three, four, five consecutive days. It is simply not good enough. One might expect me to come in and ask for the investment to upgrade this, but that has actually happened. In 2023, we got €10 million to upgrade a water treatment plant. This is simply not acceptable from an infrastructural delivery perspective. I ask the Taoiseach to ensure that there is some element of review of delivery, management, accountability and oversight of all of our semi-State utilities.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy. He might be aware that a mechanical issue arose at the Birr water treatment plant last weekend, which was repaired on Sunday. Water supply was returned to affected areas on the morning of Monday, 19 October. There are leakage reduction programme works taking place daily from 20 October until 23 October in the area, which may have impacted some supplies. All of the works in progress should be completed by the end of the week and customers should see a return to normal supply, notwithstanding a three-to-four-hour window for supply restoration.

Deputy Clendennen is correct that there has been significant investment by Uisce Éireann - by the Government, really - but that is what happened.

Deputy John Brady: On 7 November, Wicklow County Council will bring forward and enact a new differential rent scheme for its 6,500 tenants. Of those tenants, 87% will see substantial rent hikes of 100%, 200% or, in some cases, 300%. That would be fundamentally wrong at any time, but given the huge cost-of-living crisis that is impacting people right across the board in terms of putting food on the table and paying for energy and electricity, this is coming at a time when people simply cannot afford to pay those grotesque, substantial rent hikes. I have had many people, including elderly people and old age pensioners, crying down the phone to me saying that they have been put in the situation of making an impossible choice between putting food on the table, looking after their sick or, in some cases, dying family

members, wives or husbands, and paying this substantially increased rent hike. There needs to be an intervention here. This is coming about because of a failure to put in place a national harmonised rent scheme, so it is up to local authorities to bring this forward.

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

Deputy John Brady: There needs to be intervention. I am calling on the Government to intervene to stop these grotesque rent hikes proceeding.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, finish within your time.

Deputy John Brady: I call on the Minister for housing and local government to intervene and stop these hikes from going ahead on 7 November.

An Ceann Comhairle: In future, prepare your question to finish within the time, Deputy Brady.

The Taoiseach: The Government cannot be intervening in every local authority and there has to be sustainability in social housing so that we can provide for the long-term and so that people on the lists and so on have some opportunity on a continuing basis to access social housing. I am not familiar with the specific details in Wicklow County Council, but rent schemes should reflect incomes, they should be fair, and they should also enable some degree of sustainability in terms of social housing well into the future.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I want to raise a local school project, namely, the Owenabue Educate Together National School in Carrigaline. I know it is a project that the Taoiseach is familiar with. It is currently operating in temporary accommodation across two buildings in Heron's Wood estate. Fourteen months ago, the stage 1 design team addendum report was issued, but we are still waiting for stage 1 to be finalised. The current accommodation is unsuitable but every year it becomes more unsuitable because the school adds an additional class year. I ask that the Taoiseach follow up with the Department to try to ensure that stage 1 is closed out so that we can progress this project and give some certainty to the parents, teachers and all others involved in this school.

The Taoiseach: I thank Deputy McGrath for raising a very important issue in Carrigaline. We have had a lot of investment in quite a number of schools but this situation is pressing on this school. I acknowledge that and I will engage with the Minister for education in respect of it.

Deputy George Lawlor: The collapse of Clearwater Construction, a company specialising in sports infrastructure based in County Wicklow but covering a lot of Wexford, Wicklow and the wider south-east region, has already led to devastation and will lead to more among clubs. Many clubs have handed over tens of thousands of euro, and some hundreds of thousands of euro. Indeed, one soccer club in Wexford has handed over €313,000, much of which is sports capital funding, to this company.

While I appreciate that the Government has no role or function in contractual interactions between a company like this and the sports facilities, given that these clubs are run by volunteers across the board, can the Taoiseach ask the Department to intervene and assist these clubs in whatever way possible, be that advice or interaction? They really need it.

The Taoiseach: My understanding is that the Minister and the Department are endeavouring to help the clubs in terms of mentoring, advice and so on. I will talk to the Minister for sport in respect of this development. The situation that has emerged is clearly very difficult for the clubs. I thank Deputy Lawlor for raising it. We do not have mechanisms where the Government intervenes in every case a construction company collapses or whatever, but I do hear what the Deputy is saying in terms of the impact of this on the clubs themselves. I will talk to the Minister about it.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: It has been 20 years since the planning guidelines for wind turbines were updated. Since then, these turbines have doubled in height. This is a cause of great concern right across Carlow and Kilkenny in communities like Inistioge, Castlebanny and Old Leighlin. I could go on. It is not right that private developers are allowed to exploit outdated guidelines to line their pockets at the expense of communities and taxpayers through curtailment payments.

Does the Taoiseach accept that these guidelines are outdated and not fit for the current height and size of modern wind turbines? I, along with so many across Kilkenny and Carlow, want to see a moratorium on wind farms until these planning guidelines are updated to reflect present-day wind turbines.

The Taoiseach: The guidelines are being worked on. I believe there will be new guidelines brought forward by the Minister for climate and the Minister for housing, who are working together in respect of the planning statement to cover this. I would be cautious of a moratorium. We are in the middle of an energy crisis at the moment, brought on by our dependence on fossil fuels.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: Should we ignore the people?

The Taoiseach: No, I am just making the point. We have great debates in here about giving another billion euro to reduce energy prices and so on. There is a balance needed, certainly, and there will be guidelines produced. Invariably, from across the House, people will come in and say they do not want a solar farm, they do not want wind energy, they do not want gas generation. Where does all of that lead us?

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: Some communities are overrun with them.

Deputy Edward Timmins: I want to bring up the issue of name-calling that I have witnessed in this Chamber. It is an unwelcome and unnecessary part of debate. It actually is a reflection on the person themselves who does the name-calling and demonstrates that they do not have the language to deal with the issue. It shows a total lack of respect for the other person and, hence, a lack of respect for our democracy. It also lessens the authority of this Chamber,

contributes to bringing politics into disrepute, and sets a bad example. I ask that people think before they speak, before they resort to name-calling.

An Ceann Comhairle: We could all answer that, but it is the Taoiseach's turn.

The Taoiseach: It is not quite within my domain, but I agree with Deputy Timmins and support him in his endeavour regarding the avoidance of name-calling.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy and I hope everybody has that answer in their head. I call Deputy Ken O'Flynn.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: I am sure the Taoiseach will join me in welcoming James Good and Abbie Marsh in the Public Gallery, who come all the way from Ballincollig.

At 8 a.m. today, 635 patients were awaiting beds in our hospitals. Of those, 394 were on trolleys. We now have over 1 million people on hospital waiting lists. The Economic and Social Research Institute, ESRI, has stated that we need up to 7,780 more hospital beds and 1,200 more GPs by 2030. The Government's plan, as I understand it, is to deliver 3,378 beds by 2031. Earlier this year, the Taoiseach announced 268 extra nursing places throughout the country, as one of the largest expansions in the history of the State. I agree that that was wonderful to hear, but I have to note that not one of those is going to the Mercy University Hospital, the South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital or Cork University Hospital. They are in the Taoiseach's constituency.

The Taoiseach: We are now entering the winter, which is going to be very challenging. My understanding is that we had about 491 patients waiting for admission to an inpatient bed at 8 a.m. today. The Minister has, for example, completed a national procurement in terms of short-term therapeutic beds with a view to aligning with the winter emergency planning for our hospitals to try to provide additional short-term capacity that will be required over the winter period. There was also a meeting with all the regions recently in respect of the winter surge and winter plans.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: The people of Ballyheigue - over 3,000 people - are still without drinkable water in their taps two weeks on. It is not good enough. Glenderry water supply was closed down in early July and all of the pressure was put on Ballyheigue then and it has been operating at a much lower level. It needs to be closed down completely for at least two weeks to see if this will clear. If it does not, it will have to be replaced in some other way. I am asking that a pipe be laid from Ardfert to Ballyheigue to bring water to those people from Killarney, which comes from Lough Guitane. In the meantime, open up Glenderry and treat it. It is a fine supply that has worked grand for 65 years. I also ask for-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The time is up, Deputy. We have to be respectful of everyone's time. The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: -----a tanker to provide water because what is going on is not fair and it is taking to long too sort out.

The Taoiseach: I dealt with this issue in the House yesterday. My understanding from the presentation I received from the Department and from Irish Water is that there has been salt water ingress to the system, which is a very serious issue and requires serious investigation as to what has transpired here. All engineering options are being considered by Irish Water, such as the ones referred to by the Deputy. The Minister, Deputy Foley, has been in touch with me, as was the Deputy yesterday. All these ideas are being worked on but the more fundamental point is that they need to ascertain what has happened here because it is breaking new ground in terms of the challenges facing Irish Water in Ballyheigue. It is very difficult for the people of the area. I acknowledge that, absolutely.

Deputy Liam Quaide: When Cork University Hospital, CUH, CEO, Jennifer Kearney, raised serious staffing and patient safety concerns in August, the Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, lashed out, accusing the hospital of mismanaging its budget. She dismissed those concerns and repeatedly held up the mid-west as an example of sound financial management.

On Monday, mid-west TDs and Senators were briefed on a similar staffing crisis in their hospitals, with patient care seriously compromised by recruitment restrictions. Those restrictions imposed by the Ministers, Deputy Carroll MacNeill and Deputy Chambers, are having devastating consequences for patients and staff. South-west Oireachtas Members have received no such briefing, only positive news stories about CUH. The Minister has created a climate in which our regional managers are afraid to publicly acknowledge the crisis in CUH. Meanwhile, hospital managers and senior clinicians who courageously raise patient safety concerns risk being undermined, scapegoated and even sanctioned.

CUH is in the Taoiseach's constituency. It is our regional hospital. Almost every family in Cork has a connection with it. When will the Taoiseach stand up for CUH and put an end to these unworkable and unsafe recruitment restrictions?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy has some nerve. He has some nerve to ask when will I stand up for CUH. No one has overseen more investment in CUH than I have, particularly when I was the Minister for Health.

Deputy Liam Quaide: Have you talked to any of the doctors?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please, allow an answer.

The Taoiseach: I am just saying to the Deputy that there is a new maternity unit. It is there a good while now but that did not happen by accident. There are the cardiac and renal centre. There has been huge investment and the population has grown and all of that. Let us not get into whether I will or will not stand up for CUH.

Deputy Liam Quaide: No, but the recruitment freeze-----

The Taoiseach: I will make this point. There have been huge funding increases for CUH. It has increased by 109% over the past five years. It has gone from €306 million to €636 million over the past five years. That has driven notable growth in staffing numbers.

Deputy Liam Quaide: Is this just imaginary?

The Taoiseach: There has been an expansion of the workforce and there will be continuing investment. On the safety issue, the Minister did not lash out. The Minister asked Dr. Colm Henry, the chief clinical officer of the HSE, to go down to CUH because safety is important. Nothing has emerged from any examinations that there is a safety issue. Of course, there are pressures. There are real issues there and we have to manage those.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach. Deputy Charles Ward is next.

The Taoiseach: You have to work with people to ensure there is good management in those situations.

Deputy Charles Ward: I want to raise again the ongoing concerns of the nine homeowners in Elm Park, Buncrana, who are living with the combined threat of defective concrete and flooding. It has been repeatedly stated that legal advice from the Attorney General's office is being considered and that discussions are ongoing with the OPW. However, these responses have been repeated over several months without anybody providing any definitive answers and meaningful clarity for these residents. I want to ask the Taoiseach three questions. First, has a decision been made whether relocation options will be provided? Second, if not, what are the specific issues remaining? Third, when will a decision be reached?

These residents cannot be left without a timeline, waiting for legal advice and interdepartmental discussions. They have been waiting for years and the decision needs to be made. Will the Taoiseach commit today to providing a definitive update and a timeline for these people in Elm Park in Buncrana?

The Taoiseach: I will engage with the Minister for housing in respect of this. In terms of a timeline, I do not have a specific one here. If legal advices have been sought, they need to be sought. The Government has responded to the overall defective concrete blocks debacle and scandal very comprehensively, in an unprecedented way. That does not often get acknowledged. There is a suite of schemes. Approximately €400 million is being provided for pyrite, apartment defects and defective concrete blocks. I will come back to the Deputy on the specifics of the nine houses he referenced there.

Deputy Erin McGreehan: Yesterday was a big day for us. It was a historic day where we saw huge parts of the Narrow Water Bridge sail up through Dundalk Bay and into Carlingford Lough. I thank the Taoiseach for his commitment and making sure this project happened for us in County Louth.

I will turn to another historic project, namely, the very first all-Ireland university in Dundalk and the partnership with Queens that is huge not only for County Louth but for the region and indeed the country. There is a proposal in the shared island unit for funding to push forward this project. Will the Taoiseach update me on that proposal so we can continue to make history on shared island projects in County Louth?

The Taoiseach: I was delighted to see a BBC report this morning showing the excitement in the locality at the arrival of the key component parts of the bridge through Narrow Water. The shared island unit has been the key funding enabler to make that happen.

Queens University and Dundalk is a very exciting partnership that will create the first all-island university and that is something we will proactively support. My understanding is that the Minister for higher education is working with his counterparts and that they are working on the various aspects around the partnership agreement, doing an analysis and so on. The legislation is being drafted to give effect to this and this will be a game-changing initiative which will assist in the mobility of students and will be of great benefit to Dundalk, and to Queens in respect of the all-island dimension.

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere: A parent in my constituency has concerns with me regarding the Cumas disability day service in New Ross. This service plays an important role in supporting people with disabilities, providing opportunities for personal development, social interaction and greater independence. These concerns were brought to the attention of Deputy Higgins, the Minister of State with responsibility for disability, in June but a meeting has not yet taken place. Given the importance of the service to the individuals who attend it and their families, I ask that the Minister of State, or her officials, meet directly with this parent to hear their concerns in more detail and discuss the genuine issues they have raised. Would the Taoiseach be willing to arrange a meeting between this parent and the Minister of State to discuss these concerns and explore what steps can be taken to address them?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. I will engage with the Minister of State to see if a meeting can be organised with those who have raised this issue and who are concerned about it.

State Apology to the Family of the Late Brian Stack: Statements

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We now proceed to statements of apology to the family of the late Brian Stack. Before calling on the Taoiseach I wish, on behalf of the House, to acknowledge the presence of Sheila, Brian's wife, and Austin, Kieran and Oliver, his three sons, in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery. Today's proceedings mark an important milestone and a significant moment of recognition. I extend a sincere welcome to the family and express our appreciation for their attendance on this solemn occasion. They are very welcome.

The Taoiseach: Today, I welcome to the Distinguished Visitors Gallery Sheila, Austin, Kieran and Oliver Stack, the wife and sons of the late chief prison officer, Brian Stack. They have campaigned tirelessly to uncover the truth of what happened to Brian in March 1983 and to keep his memory and legacy alive, following his death in September 1984.

Unforgivably, we still do not have the full truth of, or any justice for, what happened that day. With the facts we have, we know it was a very dark day in our country's history. On the night of 25 March 1983, Brian Stack attended a boxing tournament at the National Stadium in Dublin. He was a very senior prison officer, who was serving the State with great distinction, and the father of a young family. He was leading a full and meaningful life, a man in his prime

of life. On leaving the venue, Brian was approached by a man wearing a balaclava. He was approached from behind. He was shot in the neck. Brian survived the shooting but was left paralysed and brain damaged and, after fighting on bravely for 18 months, he succumbed to his injuries on 29 September 1984. He was just 49 years old. His killer escaped with an accomplice on a motorbike and, to date, no one has been brought to justice for Brian's murder.

We know now, because of the work of his family, that Brian was targeted and shot by members of the Provisional IRA, an organisation still in possession of all the facts of what happened. It is important to put these facts on the record because I know from Brian's family that they do not want any confusion in the public mind about who was responsible for his killing. Those who shot him, transported the killer and covered for them in the intervening decades are responsible.

What happened next is why Brian's family is with us this afternoon and why I am here to offer them an apology on behalf of the Government. It is because Brian and his family, a man who was providing a hugely important service for as chief officer at Portlaoise Prison, at a time of great peril for the State, was badly failed by the investigation into his killing. A major Garda investigation was established after the shooting in March 1983 but this failed to identify those responsible. On Brian's death in September 1984, the case was reviewed by the Garda murder squad but nothing of evidential value was found. After this point, the investigation into Brian's killing remained open but dormant.

In 2007, at the request of the Stack family, the Garda Commissioner directed a review of the case by the Garda serious crime review team. This review made 202 recommendations relating to the case, leading to the Garda Commissioner directing that an independent reinvestigation team be appointed in the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation in 2008. Although this brought a fresh impetus to the investigation and led to the identification of new lines of inquiry and suspects, it also led to the identification of a number of serious failings and shortcomings in the management of the earlier Garda investigation. These failings were admitted by the Garda Commissioner to the Stack family in 2019, and my formal apology on behalf of the Government in this House today relates to those failings. They are: a failure to keep a map made of the crime scene; a failure to keep a motorbike helmet found near the crime scene and linked to the crime; and a failure to keep custody of material exhibits, including various fingerprints, samples and debris gathered during the investigation.

In addition to this, there was a failure to document some potentially important aspects of the original investigation, such as: whether an identification line up process was conducted before eyewitnesses in relation to a number of people who were arrested during the original investigation; whether prisoners at Portlaoise Prison were interviewed during the original investigation; and whether Brian's colleagues at Portlaoise Prison were interviewed during the original investigation. Furthermore, there was a failure to carry out certain steps in the investigation, which the Stack family considers particularly relevant and important to the case and which would now be considered part and parcel of a victim-centred approach to policing. These were to interview the Stack family and Brian's wider group of friends.

Although it is clear that there was a strong suspicion of Provisional IRA involvement on the part of investigators in the original investigation in the 1980s and in the reinvestigation since 2008, there was a failure by gardaí to identify a definitive link to the Provisional IRA in the shooting until this was admitted to Austin and Oliver Stack by a former IRA commander in

2013 through their family efforts to uncover the truth. It was also the Stack family who brought to light the existence of relevant intelligence received by An Garda Síochána in 1990 and brought it to the attention of the reinvestigation team in 2016. It was not recorded on the original investigation file.

An Garda Síochána is independent in its functions, and it is not for me as Taoiseach or for any other Member of this House to insert themselves into any criminal investigation. However, it is plainly and utterly unacceptable that material that was potentially of evidential value to the investigation can no longer be located by An Garda Síochána. It is admitted by An Garda Síochána that these are serious matters that had an impact on the investigation. As Taoiseach, and on behalf of the Government, I want to formally apologise to the Stack family for these failings.

When viewed in conjunction with the failure by An Garda Síochána to document those other aspects of the investigation that I have already highlighted, this failing raises legitimate concerns about how the investigation was conducted and whether it was done competently and properly. This is an inherently unfair position to place the Stack family in, and today I also apologise for this. I know from talking to the Stack family over many years that the hope for justice endures.

Since 2007, the Garda investigation into the murder of Brian has continued to progress and I understand that in 2019 a comprehensive file was submitted to the DPP for a decision. Although the outcome of this was that no charges could be brought against any suspect at that time, I am informed that An Garda Síochána continues to pursue live lines of inquiry in the case and is making every effort to bring those responsible to justice. I know that Garda liaison continues with the Stack family in this regard.

Brian Stack joined the Prison Service in 1959 and progressed through its ranks to a senior uniformed role when Portlaoise Prison became the main place of detention in the State for subversive prisoners. Brian Stack served the State with great distinction and honour at a time when the endpoint of the Troubles still appeared to be remote. The challenges the State faced at this time were very significant and prison officers like Brian were in the vanguard of the effort to defend the State against subversives who wished to undermine it during the conflict. Brian's important service was recognised by the Irish Prison Service when it renamed the Prison Service College Brian Stack House and posthumously awarded him its highest bravery award, which was also renamed the Stack Medal.

Outside of work, Brian was at heart of his community and a keen sportsman, referee and organiser at Portlaoise GAA and Portlaoise Boxing Club. Brian's commitment to public service was carried on by his son Austin, who also served the State as an assistant governor in the Irish Prison Service.

Today, as I extend this formal apology to the Stack family for the failings and shortcomings in the management of the Garda investigation into Brian's death, I am conscious that this moment marks a significant milestone for them. Brian's loss was immeasurable to them, and their entire family and community circle. The pain they have endured has been lifelong. Many in this House will already be familiar with their campaign and their tireless advocacy. Today, in addition to the apology I have offered, I also want to thank them and pay tribute to them for

their dedication to that quest, and to their father Brian. I share their hope that justice may still come.

Mar Thaoiseach, agus ar son an Rialtais, deirim go bhfuil brón orainn gur theip ar an Stát fiosrú cuimsitheach ceart a dhéanamh. Dúnmharú uafásach a bhí ann. Bhí dualgas ar an Stát an fiosrú a dhéanamh go cruinn agus i gceart. Is léir nár tharla é seo agus tá brón orainn dá dheasca sin.

Sheila, Austin, Kieran and Oliver, it is through your dignity, your courage and your love that Brian Stack will not be forgotten. It is my sincere hope that the words I speak today on behalf of the Government may provide some measure of peace to you. I am deeply sorry for what you have been put through.

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Helen McEntee): On my behalf and on that of the Tánaiste and our colleagues, I join the Taoiseach, the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, and the Minister, Deputy Jim O'Callaghan, in delivering this full and unreserved apology to the family of the late Brian Stack. I acknowledge presence of Sheila, Austin, Kieran and Oliver. The State failed you in the investigation of Brian's killing. We know those failures added to your suffering, and for that we are deeply sorry.

Today marks an important moment in your decades-long campaign to honour Brian's memory and his legacy following his shooting in 1983 and his subsequent tragic death in 1984 at just 49 years of age. I know it has been a long and painful journey from the very first shocking and devastating circumstances of his attack through his subsequent suffering and ultimately the great bereavement of his loss, along with all that has followed. I hope today brings a measure of comfort after your devoted advocacy in his name which helped to uncover the failings and shortcomings we are acknowledging here. An apology cannot undo the suffering you have endured or indeed replace the pursuit of truth and accountability.

Brian Stack, as we have heard, was chief prison officer at Portlaoise Prison during the 1980s and was the sole prison officer in the State to die as a result of a Troubles-related incident. We know now that Brian was targeted and that he was shot by members of the Provisional IRA. To repeat it, they are responsible for his death. While a major Garda investigation was established after his shooting in March 1983, this failed to identify those responsible. To date, this impact has meant the ability of An Garda Síochána to bring those perpetrators to justice has been severely impacted. Following Brian's death in September 1984, a review found no new evidence and the investigation remained open but dormant. At the urging of the Stack family, the Garda Commissioner ordered a review of the case in 2007. This led to a reinvestigation in 2008 and the identification of serious failings and shortcomings in the earlier investigation. These failings were acknowledged by the Garda Commissioner in his apology to the Stack family in 2019. Today, the Government extends a formal State apology.

Despite the strong suspicion of Provisional IRA involvement throughout the Garda investigation, it was Austin and Oliver Stack who uncovered the truth. This was not the only occasion on which the Stack family brought to light matters relevant to the investigation. In 2016 the family brought relevant intelligence - again received by the Garda in 1990 - to the attention of the reinvestigating team. Today we acknowledge failings in this House as we honour the character and contribution of Brian Stack. As the Taoiseach has outlined, the

investigation remains active and An Garda Síochána has confirmed it continues to pursue lines of inquiry to bring those responsible to justice.

Brian served the State with great distinction as chief prison officer at Portlaoise Prison. He served at a time when the Troubles meant people in positions like this were at the coalface, defending the State against subversives who wished to undermine it during the conflict. While his role as chief prison officer was in those dark days of the 1980s, his service in the Prison Service began long before when he joined in 1959. He progressed through the ranks to a senior role when Portlaoise Prison became the main place of detention in the State for subversive prisoners. There have rightly been a number of actions taken by the State in honour of Brian Stack. As the Taoiseach has referenced, in May 2013 the then Minister for justice announced the introduction by the Irish Prison Service of a new merit award scheme for prison staff, including the Stack Medal. The Stack Medal is the highest honour that can be bestowed upon a member of the staff of the Irish Prison Service in recognition of an act of exceptional personal bravery. Brian's wife Sheila accepted the first Stack Medal on her late husband's behalf in 2013 in recognition of his loyal service to the State. That same year, the main building in the Irish Prison Service College was renamed Brian Stack House, again in Mr. Stack's honour.

As we know, Brian was more than a man who served the State in a senior and highly valued role; he also served his community. He was at the heart of Portlaoise GAA and Portlaoise Boxing Club. He was a keen sportsman, a referee and an organiser. We know he was an inspiration, not least to his son Austin who carried out his legacy through his own commitment to public service and through his role as an assistant governor in the Irish Prison Service. Brian Stack was a man of resolve. He was a man of dignity and a man of courage. Those same qualities have been echoed and demonstrated in abundance by his family throughout more than four decades which were spent seeking truth, answers and above all justice.

I pay particular tribute to Brian's wife Sheila. As his wife and as the mother of their children, Sheila has borne the heartbreak of losing Brian and the pain of all that followed. Her dignity, resilience and quiet courage over so many years deserve our deepest admiration and respect. I also acknowledge the extraordinary determination of Austin, Kieran and Oliver and the courage of the entire Stack family. You should never have had to fight so hard or for so long to have the truth acknowledged and the failings of the State recognised. Your perseverance has ensured that Brian's memory has never been forgotten and that his service and his sacrifice have received the recognition they deserve. To Sheila and to all of the Stack family, we are deeply sorry for all that you have endured. For the failures of the investigation and the additional suffering that they caused you, we are deeply sorry. I hope that today's formal apology brings some measure of comfort and peace and that you know your courage and your determination have not gone unnoticed.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Seán Canney): On behalf of the Independent Members in government, I acknowledge Sheila Stack and her sons Austin, Oliver and Kieran who are with us today. For over four decades, they have lived with the devastating loss of Brian and the unanswered questions surrounding his death. Today the State formally acknowledges the loss suffered by the Stack family and the failings of the investigations that followed. These are failings that caused immense pain to Brian's family.

Brian Stack was a dedicated public servant who was chief prison officer in Portlaoise Prison at a time when Ireland was experiencing one of its most challenging periods. As has been mentioned, Brian was a man who dedicated himself to the community, having been involved in various sports and leaving an imprint on his local area. His son Austin also served as an assistant governor in the Irish Prison Service, carrying on Brian's dedication to public service. His death was an immeasurable loss for the family and the Irish Prison Service.

Brian Stack was the only prison officer in the State to lose his life during an incident related to the Troubles. The family's suffering was compounded by serious failures in the investigation of this shooting. The omission included the failure to preserve vital evidence, the loss of material exhibits and the failure to record potentially vital information during the original investigation. There was also a failure to interview members of the Stack family or other people who could have been of assistance in the investigation. These were serious shortcomings in an investigation into the murder of a man who had dedicated his working life to serving the State. These failings and their effect on the investigation were acknowledged by the Garda Commissioner in his apology to the family in 2019. It is right that those failings and their impact be formally acknowledged here in the Dáil.

For the Stack family, time has not eroded their pain or their desire to know what happened. They have spent over 40 years seeking answers and accountability. No family should ever have to carry this burden for so long. An apology cannot undo what has happened and cannot give the Stack family back the years they should have been with Brian, but it is an important acknowledgement of what went wrong. The family should not have had to spend so many years seeking answers about the murder of their husband and father. We owe it to those who serve the State and their families to ensure they are treated with fairness and respect. The State has previously recognised Brian Stack's service and sacrifice. In 2013 Sheila Stack accepted the first Stack Medal on behalf of her late husband, recognising his loyal service to the State. The naming of Brian Stack House in the Irish Prison Service College is another lasting recognition of his contribution. These honours are important but so too is the formal acknowledgement of the shortcomings in the investigation into his death. The investigation of the murder remains open. I hope the ongoing pursuit of those responsible for the murder will bring the family more answers. The family have waited a long time for the truth. I hope those responsible will ultimately be brought to justice.

Today, we are remembering Brian Stack not just as a victim of a terrible crime but also as a loving husband and father and a dedicated public servant. I again acknowledge Sheila, Austin, Oliver and Kieran and their determination over so many years to establish the truth. Brian Stack was an honourable man who devoted his life to the State. His family deserve a thorough investigation into his murder and they deserve answers. I express my sincere sympathy for their loss to Sheila, Austin, Oliver and Kieran and the wider Stack family as we remember Brian today.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: On behalf of Sinn Féin, I welcome today's State apology to the family of Brian Stack. I offer my sincere sympathies to his wife Sheila and their sons Austin, Kieran and Oliver. The shooting of Brian Stack was wrong. It should never have happened. His family suffered a terrible loss. The failures in the investigations compounded that suffering and left them seeking answers over many decades. We cannot presume to understand their grief but we can recognise that the passing years do not diminish their loss or their entitlement

to truth and justice. In 2013, a former IRA leader acknowledged that IRA volunteers were responsible for the shooting of Brian Stack. He said it should not have happened and expressed sorrow to the family.

The Stack family's long search for answers deserves respect. More broadly, Sinn Féin supports a comprehensive, independent truth recovery process to address conflict-related deaths across this island. Such a process can help families to establish what happened and provide meaningful acknowledgement for their loss. The Stack family deserved an effective Garda investigation. They deserved to have information pursued, evidence properly examined and their concerns treated seriously. Today, the State acknowledges that they were failed. That acknowledgment recognises publicly that the family deserved better and that investigative failures added to the burden that they were already carrying.

No apology can restore Brian Stack's life or return the years spent seeking answers, but it can recognise the wrong done. Across this island, other families also continue to seek answers. Their circumstances differ, but each deserves dignity, compassion and a fair hearing. Families should be supported in seeking truth and accountability without having to carry the burden of a public campaign for decades. A comprehensive truth recovery and legacy process must be independent and accessible to all families bereaved through conflict-related violence. All those holding relevant information must play their part. Alongside it, there must be a fair and effective framework for examining wider historical investigative failures and miscarriages of justice.

As an Irish republican, I believe that building a better future requires us to face the past with honesty. People from all walks of life and every background suffered through the actions of British state forces, republicans - including the IRA - and unionist paramilitaries. The hurt caused by republican actions must be acknowledged and that suffering cannot be disowned. I am sorry for all the lives lost during the period of conflict on this island, without exception. My commitment to a united Ireland is a commitment to a country in which every person's dignity is respected and every family's suffering is heard.

We have now enjoyed many years of peace. A generation has grown up free from the daily fear of violence that scarred so many lives. We must protect that achievement, help those still carrying its wounds, and ensure the tragedies of the past are never visited upon another generation. We cannot change the past but we can help people to heal and we can work to ensure that its violence and suffering are never repeated. Today, we acknowledge Brian Stack's life, his family's loss and the investigative failures they endured. I welcome this apology and hope it provides meaningful acknowledgement after so many years.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis labhairt inniu chun tacú leis an leithscéal seo ón Stát agus chun mo chomhbhrón a chur in iúl do theaghlach Stack. I also want to welcome today's State apology to the family of Brian Stack and to repeat that the shooting of Brian Stack was wrong. It was a terrible loss for his family and should never have happened. I again offer my sincere sympathies to his wife Sheila and their three sons, Austin, Kieran and Oliver. I know that the passage of time does not make grief any less and I do not pretend to understand the pain and loss they feel. The Stack family deserve truth and justice, as does every family who has lost a loved one in violent circumstances. The Stack family continues to

have unanswered questions and their search for answers deserves not only respect but the full support and assistance of this House.

More broadly, we need a comprehensive, independent truth recovery process so that we can ensure that all bereaved families can establish what happened and provide meaningful acknowledgement for their losses. The Stack family deserved an effective Garda investigation. They deserved to have their questions treated seriously and every reasonable effort made to establish the truth. Today's apology acknowledges that investigative failures compounded their suffering. It is right that the State recognises those failures and the hurt they caused. An apology is an important public acknowledgement. It recognises that the family deserved better and that their concerns should have been addressed. I know that no words spoken here today can restore Brian Stack's life or recover the years that his family have spent seeking answers but the acknowledgement today matters. Families should be able to understand the decisions affecting their case and to know who is responsible for taking matters forward. Everyone who can assist bereaved families in establishing the truth, including in this case, has a responsibility to do so.

As Sinn Féin justice spokesperson, I believe there are lessons about how our institutions respond to bereaved families and how concerns about investigative failures are examined. That requires proper communication, accountability and a willingness to acknowledge when things are done wrong. We see the enduring importance of these issues in the Omagh bombing inquiry and the inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane, both now under way following many years of campaigning by bereaved families. These are distinct inquiries examining different circumstances but what they underline is how deeply the need for answers endures and how much families can be required to carry in pursuing them.

Other families and individuals continue their own searches for truth, accountability and acknowledgement. In that context, I also acknowledge the families of Councillor Eddie Fullerton and John Hayes, and also campaigners such as Dominic Óg McGlinchey and Osgur Breatnach. They are very different cases with very different circumstances but each deserves to be considered on its own evidence with dignity and respect for those affected. Some families have spent years campaigning and some have pursued legal action, while others have neither the profile nor the resources to sustain such efforts, but every family should have access to a fair and independent process without having to sustain a decades-long campaign. A comprehensive truth recovery and legacy process must be accessible to all families bereaved through the conflict, regardless of who is responsible for their loss. All those holding relevant information must be willing to play their part.

Alongside that process, we need a fair, transparent and independent framework for examining wider historical investigative failures and miscarriages of justice. Families need to know how their concerns can be raised, how they can be examined and what supports will be available to them. Where failures are established, there should be accountability and, where appropriate, an apology. The injustices and tragedies of the past have left a deep legacy of suffering and trauma in our society. During the conflict, people from across this island suffered through the actions of state forces; republicans, again including the IRA; and unionist paramilitaries. As a republican, I want to acknowledge the hurt caused by republican actions. That suffering cannot be disowned. I am sorry for all of the lives lost during the conflict. The past cannot be undone but what we can do together is work to help people to heal and to ensure

that the grief, hurt and violence of those years are never repeated. That requires us all to listen to those who have suffered, acknowledge their experiences and uphold their fundamental right to truth and justice.

Today, our first responsibility is to acknowledge Brian Stack - his life, the suffering of his family and the failures they endured. I repeat that the shooting of Brian Stack was wrong. His family deserve truth, justice and a proper Garda investigation. I sincerely hope that this apology provides some meaningful acknowledgment to them of the suffering they have endured over so many years.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: On behalf of the Social Democrats, at the outset I want to acknowledge and welcome members of the Stack family who are here today: Brian's wife Sheila and his sons Austin, Kieran and Oliver. The public apology that has been delivered today is long overdue because the murder of Brian Stack by the IRA was not just a crime against Brian and his family; it was also an attack on the State.

At the time of his murder, Brian was the chief prison officer of Portlaoise Prison. It was a tough job which Brian carried out with distinction. On 25 March 1983, Brian was shot as he left an amateur boxing contest in the National Stadium. It was a cowardly and despicable crime which left Brian with catastrophic injuries. He died 18 months later. Nobody has ever been charged or convicted in connection with his murder.

Before I talk about the serious flaws in the Garda investigations that followed, I want to remember Brian as a person because he was much more than the victim of that terrible crime. Most of all, he was devoted to his loving wife, Sheila, and his three young sons. He was also very involved in the GAA and boxing. He played hurling and was a noted intercounty referee. One particularly poignant photo I saw of Brian and his young sons was taken in 1976, in which they were all holding hurleys.

When he was shot in 1983, his eldest son, Austin, was just 14, Kieran was 13 and his youngest son, Oliver, was 12. They were robbed of their father, his love and his guidance. He was robbed of the opportunity to watch them grow and to meet his eight grandchildren. Later on, Austin spoke about how harrowing and traumatic that period of their lives was. He said:

> As we grew up, 1983 was a very tough time for all of us ... As a 14-year-old, you're shaving your father and he starts to cry. Those sort of things will remain with us for a long, long time.

The failure to bring anyone to justice for this heinous crime compounded this suffering, as did the refusal of the IRA to admit responsibility, something which took 30 long years. In total, there were three separate Garda investigations into Brian's murder, and there has been very little transparency about what exactly went wrong. In 2019, the then Garda Commissioner, Drew Harris, apologised for "failings and shortcomings in the investigation". He further stated that these failings were serious and had a detrimental impact on the investigation. The Stack family has been told that some of these failings related to key witnesses not being interviewed, material evidence such as fingerprint records going missing and critical intelligence not being acted on. However, no report on these failings has been published for all to see. A serious crime review team report detailing the failings has not been published and this is not acceptable. The Government is now issuing a State apology, which is right and proper, but we also need

transparency and accountability. At a minimum, the Government should commit to publishing the report of the serious crime review team. I do not see why this cannot be done. Like this apology, its publication is long overdue.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I acknowledge and welcome Sheila, Austin, Kieran and Oliver Stack and thank them for their immense courage and their dignity in being here today. The grace and determination the members of the Stack family have shown throughout their decades-long campaign for justice have been nothing short of remarkable. What began as a senseless act of violence against this family became a decades-long fight for answers, accountability and the truth. At almost every turn, they met barriers that should never have been put in their way in the first place. The murder of Brian Stack was an appalling act but what followed, and the manner in which his family was treated in its search for justice, compounded this tragedy in ways that are very difficult to comprehend.

My colleague, Deputy O'Callaghan, has just spoken about the enormous loss Brian's murder represented to his young family at the time. It is something we should all take a moment to reflect on today. Before we speak about investigations, reports, institutional failures or State apologies, we should remember the man at the centre of all this. Brian Stack was a devoted husband and father. He was a dedicated public servant who carried out an incredibly difficult job with diligence and integrity. His bravery was recognised throughout his career and it stands in the starkest possible contrast to the cowardice of those who murdered him. He was shot in the back and his killers spent three decades refusing to acknowledge their responsibility. Even this acknowledgement did not come willingly. It came after years of extraordinary persistence by a family that should never have had to fight so hard for the truth. This is something we cannot lose sight of today. The Stack family were not simply grieving the loss of a husband and father; they were forced to become campaigners, to challenge institutions, to pursue information and to confront people who had an obligation to tell the truth. All the while, they were dealing with the most unimaginable personal loss.

What makes this particularly difficult is that the family's suffering was compounded time and again by the failures of the State itself. We know that 194 distinct errors were identified in the first investigation into Brian's murder. This is an extraordinary number of failings in an investigation into a murder of this seriousness. They were not simply administrative mistakes or minor oversights; they were serious failures that undermined the investigation and, ultimately, the family's pursuit of justice. For years, Brian's family's belief about who was involved in this heinous act was not properly acknowledged. Information was withheld from the family and the transparency it was entitled to was not forthcoming. There is no way to undo the damage these failures have caused. No apology, however sincere, can give Brian Stack back to his family. No words spoken in this Chamber today can return the years his family have had to spend fighting for answers.

We have an obligation now to ask ourselves what it means for the State to apologise. An apology cannot simply be the end of a process; it has to be worth the paper it is written on. If we are serious about acknowledging the failures that took place, we must be prepared to confront them openly. I agree with Deputy O'Callaghan that this should mean publishing the serious crime review team's report. This would allow Brian's family and the public to understand the full extent of what went wrong. It would mean recognising that transparency is not something to be feared or avoided simply because the truth might be uncomfortable.

There is a broader point here about how we approach truth and reconciliation on this island. We speak a great deal about reconciliation, and rightly so, but reconciliation cannot mean avoiding difficult conversations. It cannot mean asking families to move on while the questions they have spent decades asking remain unanswered. It certainly cannot mean that the passage of time somehow diminishes the responsibilities of those who committed acts of violence or the institutions that subsequently failed the families left behind. If we are serious about truth and reconciliation, we have to be willing to have these hard conversations. We have to be prepared to acknowledge uncomfortable truths, even when they challenge the narratives that institutions have held onto for decades. We have to understand that reconciliation without truth is not meaningful reconciliation at all.

The Stack family has demonstrated this more clearly than anybody. These family members have shown extraordinary courage in pursuing answers, even when doing so meant confronting powerful institutions and facing enormous resistance. The very least we owe them now is the willingness to do the difficult things ourselves, to be open about what happened, to acknowledge the full extent of the State's failures and to ensure the apology is accompanied by meaningful action.

I again acknowledge Sheila, Austin, Kieran and Oliver. I have enormous admiration for the dignity and determination you have shown throughout your campaign. You should not have had to fight so hard. You should never have had to spend decades demanding answers that ought to have been provided to you. While today is an important moment, I hope it is not presented as the conclusion of the State's responsibility to your family. The measure of this apology will not simply be in the words spoken here today; it will also be in what the State is prepared to do after the words have been spoken. Go raibh maith agaibh and thank you for your courage and dignity.

Deputy William Aird: I take this opportunity to welcome Sheila Stack, and her sons, Austin, Oliver and Kieran, to the House today. I welcome the Government's decision to issue a formal apology to the family of the late Brian for the serious shortcomings in the Garda investigation into his shooting and death. As a Laois TD, I believe this is an important moment for our county and for the Irish Prison Service.

Brian Stack served the State with distinction as chief prison officer at Portlaoise Prison during a difficult and dangerous period in our history. He was a dedicated public servant who carried out his duties with commitment. His life was tragically changed and ended by a brutal attack. I know Brian's death was a devastating loss to you, Sheila; to your three sons, Austin, Oliver and Kieran; and to all of your extended family. It was also a loss to the Irish Prison Service and the wider community in County Laois.

What makes this tragedy more painful is that more than four decades later, nobody has been brought to justice for his killing. The shortcomings in the original investigation were very serious. Important evidence was not retained, aspects of the investigation were not correctly documented, and Brian's family and wider circle of friends were not interviewed. It is troubling that the family itself had to bring relevant intelligence to the attention of investigators. These failures affected an investigation into the killing of a public servant and added to the distress of the family, who have spent decades seeking answers.

2 o'clock

I acknowledge the determination of Sheila, Austin, Oliver and Kieran in pursuing the truth about what happened to Brian. Their persistence over many years, in the face of considerable disappointment, deserves our respect. The Garda Commissioner apologised to the family in 2019, and the Government's decision to make a formal apology in this House today is an important acknowledgement of the failings that occurred. It demonstrates that the State is prepared to recognise where it fell short and to acknowledge the consequences for those affected. I know an apology cannot undo the family's loss, but it shows that Brian Stack's family deserved better and that the failings in the investigation must be recognised.

Brian Stack's service has not been forgotten, as has been said. The establishment of the Stack Medal, the Irish Prison Service's highest award for exceptional personal bravery, and the naming of Brian Stack House at the Irish Prison Service College in Portlaoise are fitting tributes to his courage and dedication. I am glad this recognition is accompanied by a continued commitment to seeking justice. I welcome the confirmation that the investigation remains active, and I encourage An Garda Síochána to follow every appropriate line of inquiry to bring those responsible to justice.

Today, we recognise Brian Stack's service to the State. We acknowledge the suffering endured by his family, and we welcome an apology that has been sought for many years. I hope this formal acknowledgement brings some comfort to Sheila, Austin, Oliver and Kieran. As a person born and reared in Portlaoise, I also want to say that Brian's father came from County Kerry to serve as an engineer with Laois County Council. The Stack family have been part of the community in Portlaoise and the community in Togher. I do not remember them being there, but I know Brian's father lived out there at one stage.

When I was very young and living on the Abbeyleix Road in Portlaoise, my friends and I would go to the back of the Garda station, which is very close to our homes, and we would watch Brian Stack in there coaching younger people in boxing. I remember great people such as the late Bobby Blackwell, who was a garda in Portlaoise, and Gordon Blackwell who did boxing there. Brian Stack, as we would have known him when we were very young, would have been in there, not training those people but the younger kids. I can remember that distinctly.

I say that because Brian Stack was a man who gave of his time outside work for the greater good of younger people in Portlaoise. He hurled with Portlaoise, as did his sons. Not only did he do that, but he also gave of his time as a referee, officiating at many underage matches to encourage people participating in sport. Little did I think I would be at a Portlaoise Town Commission meeting when the late Brian Stack died. That meeting used to be held at night, and it was adjourned as a mark of respect.

It is nice to be here today to be a part of this apology on behalf of the Government. To Sheila, to her sons, to both extended families, and to the O'Donoghue family, I want to say that I agree with everything that has been done and said here today. Brian Stack deserves to be remembered with dignity and respect, and his family deserves our continued support in the pursuit of truth.

Deputy Erin McGreehan: There is a fierce loneliness and sadness in the Chamber today as the State apologises for its own failures to investigate an horrific crime. There is something deeply painful about a family having to spend more than 40 years asking the State to

acknowledge that it failed them. My thoughts today are with Sheila, Austin, Oliver and Kieran and everybody who loved Brian Stack. The presence of the Stack family here and the statements today remind us of a very dark time. It was difficult to listen to some in the Opposition because talk is cheap and easy, but actions are far more difficult.

Brian Stack was chief prison officer at Portlaoise Prison, as many have said, and a man who served the State with pride and dignity. To his family, however, he was a husband, a daddy and a person they expected to come home. In March 1983, Brian was shot as he left a boxing tournament. He survived, paralysed, and lived with devastating consequences until his death 18 months later. He was just 49. It was a desperate, cowardly and disgusting act by the Provisional IRA, a ruthless and rotten organisation that inflicted pain and terror on so many victims and families.

We cannot measure what those months after the attack were like for Brian, Sheila and their boys, as they experienced fear, hopelessness and the grief of then losing him. Their suffering has been compounded by serious failures of the Irish authorities. Evidence was not retained, important investigative steps were not documented and Brian's family and friends were not interviewed. Unfortunately, the State has replicated these failures in respect of other acts of violence during the Troubles. These failures have affected the possibility of bringing many killers to justice, including Brian Stack's, and have denied many families the answers they deserved. The State should have carried out that responsibility. Instead, the Stack family had to keep pushing, questioning and searching for the truth. They should never have had to work so hard. I welcome the Taoiseach's full and unreserved apology today. It matters that the State says clearly on the record of this House that the family was profoundly failed by the State.

However, we have to be honest that no one has been brought to justice for Brian Stack's killing. The passage of time does not diminish that responsibility, and anyone who holds information should come forward. A family has waited for far too long. People know who did this. If they really want a peaceful and reconciled island and a peaceful and proper future, which we all want in this House, they must face up to what they did.

As somebody from Louth, a Border county, I know that peace requires us to face up to those painful truths. We cannot ask bereaved families to set their grief aside because the truth is uncomfortable. Their loved ones mattered, and their questions still matter. Although the truth is desperately painful, they are faced with hypocrisy, contradiction, hurt and trauma. Far too many families are still awaiting justice and knowledge not only of what happened to their loved ones but in many cases, and in the cases of those who disappeared, even where their bodies are.

An apology cannot return the years with Brian that were stolen from his family or answer every question, but I sincerely hope today brings his family some measure of peace. Brian Stack served the State with dignity and gave it proper service. His family deserves better. Today, we must mean every word of that apology and ensure that more is done for the Stack family in Brian's memory.

Deputy Claire Kerrane: I welcome today's State apology to the family of Brian Stack, and I too offer my sympathies to Brian's wife, Sheila, and to their sons, Austin, Kieran and Oliver. Brian Stack's shooting was wrong and should never have happened. The Stack family's search for truth and for justice deserves respect and support.

I was five years old when the Good Friday Agreement was signed. I grew up with the possibilities that peace opened for my generation because others found the courage to talk, negotiate and build a peaceful and democratic way forward. I entered politics because I believe in a united Ireland and a better future for everybody who shares this island. That belief fills me with hope but it also brings a responsibility to listen to those who carry the hurt of the past.

People from every section of the community suffered through the actions of various actors in the conflict, including the forces of the British state, the IRA and loyalists. As a republican, I acknowledge the suffering caused by all republican actions. My generation inherited a hard-won peace. We must protect that peace and help those who are still living with the hurt of the past.

We cannot ask families to leave their grief behind. That is not possible. We must support their right to truth and justice. That requires a comprehensive and independent truth recovery process for conflict-related deaths alongside a fair examination of wider investigative failures and miscarriages of justice. Everyone who can help families to establish the truth has a responsibility to do all that they can. For my generation, building on peace means facing the past honestly and helping to create a future in which the suffering of the past is never repeated. Today, I hope this apology provides some meaningful acknowledgement of the loss and the failures that the Stack family have endured.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I welcome the opportunity, on behalf of the Labour Party, to speak on the State apology to the family of the late Brian Stack in relation to the grave failures in the investigations into his murder. This apology from the State is long overdue. It is very welcome.

I express my deepest sympathies to the family of Brian Stack – Sheila, Austin, Kieran and Oliver – who are with us today, and commend them on their long campaign for justice. Even though they continue to be denied justice for the murder of their father, I hope that today's apology and acknowledgement of State failings will be of some comfort and support to them.

Brian Stack was chief prison officer at Portlaoise Prison. Forty-three years ago, in March 1983, after attending a boxing match, he was shot in the neck and paralysed, and ultimately died in September 1984, aged just 49. Brian Stack was a husband, father, committed local sports organiser and dedicated public servant. He went out to enjoy an evening of sport and never returned to the life he had known, leaving a wife and three young sons. His killing was an appalling act of violence. It was an attack on a servant of the State, indeed on the State itself, and it had devastating consequences for the people who knew and loved him.

The Stack family have shown extraordinary determination, resilience and courage over the four decades and more since Brian was killed. They have continued to ask questions, to seek answers and to insist that failures in the investigations should be recognised. We know that a State apology will not compensate them for the years of love and companionship stolen from them and from Brian's eight grandchildren. It cannot return the years they have lost or undo their suffering. It cannot secure the conviction of Brian's murderer. However, today's statements are essential in affirming that the Stack family were failed and that they were right to raise the questions that they have asked. I acknowledge the words of Austin Stack, who has spoken of the comfort this apology will bring, particularly to Sheila, in finally having the State officially recognise that they were failed.

In 2013, the Provisional IRA accepted responsibility for Brian Stack's killing, but no one has ever been brought to justice for it, despite three separate investigations into the murder. Those investigations, the initial one in particular, we know now to have been riddled with defects, and indeed the Taoiseach outlined some of the particular failings and defects. In 2019, the former Garda Commissioner apologised for his organisation's failures on that front.

It is important for this House to apologise today too. Labour is a party in opposition today but my party has served in government. We recognise and acknowledge the State failures that we are here to discuss and we echo the apology from the Taoiseach. However important an apology may be, it is no substitute for justice. There must be people who know who Brian Stack's killer or killers are. Indeed, it has been alleged that former Members of this House either knew who the killer was or possessed information that would have been material to an investigation into the killer. In this context, as we know, on 7 December 2016 former TD and leader of Sinn Féin, Gerry Adams made a Dáil statement, a personal explanation by a Member, on the murder of Brian Stack. It is very rare for the Dáil to give a Member time for a personal statement. It is the Labour Party's view that Gerry Adams wasted that opportunity in failing to provide the Stack family with substantive answers in that statement. Exactly ten years since that statement, there are still far too many questions that have not been addressed by Sinn Féin. Gerry Adams is no longer a Member of this House. There is no Dáil mechanism to enable him to make a second statement in the Oireachtas, but his party still has Dáil representation and it still has outstanding questions to answer, as the Government does.

On the Government failings and the serious crime review report, Austin Stack has said this week that the review team found 194 errors and omissions in the first investigation and that his family has received only a verbal summary of some of them. The Stack family have asked successive Ministers for justice to allow them to see the full report. I repeat that call and ask the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, to ensure the report will be disclosed to the family after today's apology.

Sinn Féin also has a role here. Austin Stack has called on it to apologise and to do more than that, namely assist in the quest for justice for Brian.

For anyone watching, I repeat the call of former Garda Commissioner, Drew Harris. When making his apology in 2019, he confirmed then that the investigation remained open. He appealed for anyone with information to come forward. That appeal remains equally important today. Indeed, it was very welcome to hear the Taoiseach say that An Garda Síochána continues to pursue live lines of inquiry in this case, that the Garda is making every effort to bring those responsible to justice and that it is continuing to liaise with the Stack family in that regard. That is extremely welcome. Anyone with information on the murder of Brian Stack, even all these years later, must come forward to the Garda now.

When a family seeks answers after the murder of a loved one, particularly a loved one murdered in the service of the State, the State must do all in its power to pursue the truth. When that does not happen and investigations fail, families still deserve accountability. Today is about Brian Stack and the people who loved him. It is about the grief that the family have had to carry for more than four decades. It is about their strength in challenging the State and those who knew what went on that day, and about their courage. It is also about their courage. Their courage has been no mean feat. They deserve our fulsome commendations for the work they have done in seeking to uncover the truth.

On behalf of the Labour Party again, I welcome the State apology today. I hope it brings some measure of comfort to the Stack family. I also hope it will cause those with the means of assisting them to reflect further, to reflect and to do the right thing in helping and supporting the family in their long-standing quest to expose the truth of what happened to Brian Stack and to secure justice and accountability for him now. Brian Stack and his family deserved better from the State 40 years ago, and they deserve better today too.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I welcome the State's and the Taoiseach's full, unreserved apology to the Stack family this afternoon. I welcome Sheila, Austin, Oliver and Kieran to the House. Our thoughts are also with the wider Stack family and Brian's Prison Service colleagues. Brian Stack was chief prison officer at Portlaoise Prison. In March 1983, he was shot from behind as he left the National Stadium. He was left paralysed and died 18 months later, aged just 49. He is the only prison officer in the State to die as a result of the Troubles. I have met Austin on several occasions, most recently in my capacity as Cathaoirleach of the Good Friday Agreement committee. Austin was 14 when his father died. For decades, his family has fought tirelessly for answers. They brought to light intelligence never recorded on the original file and, in 2013, through their own efforts, they secured an admission of IRA responsibility. No family should have to do this work. Today, the State acknowledges its failures. The map of the crime scene was not kept, the motorcycle helmet was not kept, fingerprints were not kept and the family were never even interviewed. Those failings were serious. They affected the investigation itself, and no one has ever been brought to justice for the killing of Brian Stack.

Today shows that the legacy of the Troubles is a question for this State too. Last night, the House of Commons passed the Northern Ireland Troubles Bill by 330 votes to 178, and it now goes to the House of Lords. The Government has called this an important milestone, and I agree, but the legislation must also comply with the European convention and stay faithful to the joint framework. I share the concerns about one particular element. Serious Troubles-related prosecutions will now need the consent of the attorney general in London. The reforms that flowed from the Good Friday Agreement removed the attorney general's power to direct prosecutions, and I know these concerns are shared across the North too. However, there is progress as well. Legislation passed this year allows the Omagh bombing inquiry to seek sworn evidence from the Garda and officials. Last month, it heard from a senior Garda detective. That is both Governments delivering on their commitments. The families and, indeed, the victims will judge that progress by the answers it brings. However, Governments cannot do this alone. Those who were involved hold answers no file contains. The Stack family proved that. Four families still wait to bury their loved ones: Joe Lynskey, Columba McVeigh, Robert Nairac and Seamus Maguire.

I renew the call on former paramilitary groups to bring what they know to the Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, engage fully with the new information retrieval body and give these families a degree of closure. I ask the Taoiseach to raise these issues with the British Government, particularly while the Bill is with the House of Lords.

Brian Stack served this State with courage. For far too long, the State did not serve his family as it should have. I hope today's State apology brings some degree of closure and peace to the family.

Deputy Paula Butterly: At the heart of this story is a man who was in the fullness of his life, a wife, Sheila, who had a wonderful husband by her side and sons, Austin, Kieran and Oliver, who had a wonderful father who was part of the community. All too tragically, undeservedly and unjustifiably, he was struck down in the prime of his life. While we are all here to acknowledge the failings of the State and the investigations, we should never forget that the true cause of his death was by the perpetrator and that there are people here today, both inside and outside of this Chamber, who hold the answers to many of those questions.

I wish to acknowledge the immense dignity, perseverance and strength shown by Sheila Stack and her sons for more than four decades in their pursuit of truth and justice for their husband and father. While no apology can undo the terrible loss suffered by the Stack family, today's full and unreserved apology is an important recognition of the serious failings that occurred in the investigations following the murder of Brian, their husband and father.

We remember Brian's dedication and service to the State and the sacrifices made by his family. I hope this apology brings some measure of acknowledgement, comfort and closure to Brian's family. Their dignity, resilience and determination have been an example to us all. Today, we stand with the Stack family and reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that every effort continues to be made in the pursuit of truth and justice. I hope they never lose hope that, in some way, we can get that truth for them. I stand with my colleagues and appeal, beg and implore anyone, either inside or outside of this Chamber, to bring forth that information and give comfort once and for all to the Stack family.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: The killing of Brian Stack was absolutely wrong. There can be no equivocation in that regard. No Irish republican would ever try to justify what happened. It was absolutely wrong. I commend Sheila and the Stack family on their campaign for answers and justice.

When I look at the litany of Garda failures, I want to also tell the story of someone I personally knew and loved, namely Councillor Eddie Fullerton from my hometown of Buncrana, County Donegal. Eddie was assassinated by unionist paramilitaries in May 1991. Looking at the litany of failures by An Garda Síochána in the investigation of Brian Stack, they are repeated and even worse in the case of Councillor Eddie Fullerton, whose murder occurred just a short number of years later. A key witness had seen those responsible, clearly having burned out the car used and being picked up by another car. That key witness was dismissed by a senior member of An Garda Síochána when they presented their evidence the next day. It was only 12 years later when the witness listened to Eddie Fullerton's late son, Albert Fullerton, on the radio and reached out to him that the family became aware of this. Key forensic evidence was not dealt with. Legal people who looked at this case years later were shocked at the lack of professionalism and the sheer indifference they saw.

Ballistic evidence – this is shocking – was passed over by the RUC on the killing of another republican. The same gun used in that killing was used to kill Eddie Fullerton. There were four key suspects, but it would take a decade before An Garda Síochána asked for them to be questioned. We now know that one of the suspects went on to be responsible for the massacres in Castlerock and Greysteel. He was a British military agent and a sectarian serial killer. That is what happens when there is a failure to follow the evidence, interview witnesses or have any

sort of passion for this. The Fullerton family repeatedly had to have meetings with the Taoiseach's predecessor, Bertie Ahern, and with senior gardaí.

I challenge anyone to read the report by former Chief Superintendent Noel White. It is an utter disgrace and a shambles of a report that wilfully obstructed the truth that they knew and must have had in their possession. That legacy of An Garda Síochána is a betrayal of the many decent, honourable members whom I have known all my life. They are good, honest and decent people but they were failed, for whatever reason, by senior people. We see it again in the case of Brian Stack. It is a sad case. Some day, I hope there will be a State apology for the family of Councillor Eddie Fullerton.

Deputy Emer Currie: The Provisional IRA's violence was brutal, vicious, cowardly and futile. It included a daughter shot beside her parents after mass, families bombed on remembrance Sunday, a father chained into a vehicle carrying a bomb and Brian Stack, father of three, shot in the neck as he left a boxing contest. I feel angry for those robbed of their lives and families robbed of a future together. I feel angry that it was done in the name of a united Ireland. I wish as much energy went into providing answers for families over the years as went into trying to justify the unjustifiable.

Mr. Stack served the State as a prison officer. His wife, Sheila, and her three young sons endured 18 months of his suffering before losing him. I commend the family's dignity and bravery. Austin has supported me from time to time on social media and, today, I want to show my solidarity to him and his family.

Three Garda investigations have brought no one to justice. According to Austin, in media reports, a review identified 194 errors and omissions in the original investigation. Today's apology matters but the family must also receive the fullest possible account of what went wrong, including the circumstances surrounding the investigation. Austin has called on Sinn Féin to show moral leadership and basic humanity in helping to establish the truth. No family should have to plead for answers. No organisation should ask of others what it is not willing to do itself.

Last night, the Northern Ireland Troubles Bill completed its passage through the House of Commons. It now goes to the House of Lords, which is a significant step towards implementing the joint framework agreed by both governments. We must advance our own legislation and ensure these arrangements deliver answers for families. Currently, however, there is no barrier to doing the right thing. An independent truth recovery process is not needed to do the right thing. All combatants should be giving maximum information to victims and survivors.

Gardaí yesterday appealed for men who were present 19 years ago at the murder of Paul Quinn. The Quinn family deserves truth. The McVeigh family still waits for the day they can give a Christian burial to Columba. They deserve information. All victims deserve truth and accountability, whoever was responsible. The Stack family deserves this apology, and I am so pleased to be here today. They also deserve the truth.

Deputy Tony McCormack: I acknowledge Sheila Stack and her sons, Austin, Kieran and Oliver.

For most of us, Brian Stack's murder is a chapter in our country's history, but for his family, it is not history. It is a husband who never came home, a father missing from the family table, from the birthdays, Christmases and all of those ordinary, yet precious, moments that make up a life together. No apology can ever give those moments back. Brian Stack was a public servant carrying out a difficult, dangerous job on behalf of this State. He deserved its protection and his family deserved justice when he was murdered. As a Member of this House, I want to associate myself with the Taoiseach's State apology and offer my own sincere apology to the Stack family. They deserved better from the institutions of the State and I am deeply sorry that they did not receive it. I want to acknowledge the extraordinary courage of the Stack family. For over four decades, through disappointment and unanswered questions, they never gave up seeking justice for a man they loved.

That brings me to something I believe deeply. Anyone can do what is right when it is easy, when there is no personal cost and no consequences. When doing what is right is difficult, when the consequences are real, that is when the true measure of our character is revealed. That is courage, that is integrity, and that is the measure by which we should be judged. I could stand here and shout across the Chamber demanding answers, but what good is another political exchange to a family who have waited so long? Instead, I want to speak directly to anyone who knows the truth. There comes a time in our lives when we must take stock. We must look at the ledger of our lives and weigh the good we have done against the wrongs we have committed. In the stillness of the night, when the world falls silent and we are left alone with our conscience, we cannot hide from that reckoning. We cannot rewrite yesterday but we can still choose what we write tomorrow. To those who know the truth about Brian Stack's murder, I ask them to find the courage to make that choice today.

I say to Sheila, Austin, Kieran and Oliver that their husband and father served this country with courage and they have honoured his memory with their own courage. I hope today's apology brings some comfort, but more importantly, that it brings them closer to the truth and the justice they have sought for so long. I want them to know that the search for answers must not end here. Time may pass, memories may fade and generations may change but justice does not have an expiry date.

Deputy Michael Collins: Today is, first and foremost, about the Stack family. For more than four decades, the family of Brian Stack have carried an unimaginable burden. They lost a husband, a father and a public servant in the most tragic of circumstances. Since then, they have endured years of grief, uncertainty and a long search for answers. No words spoken in this Chamber today can undo that loss. No apology, however sincere, can bring Brian back to his family or restore the years that have been taken from them. However, acknowledging wrongdoing, recognising suffering and ensuring that the voices of victims and their families are heard matters.

I want to pay tribute to the courage, dignity and determination shown by the Stack family throughout their long campaign. Despite all that they have endured, they have continued to seek truth, justice and accountability with remarkable strength. As Members of this House, regardless of political party, we owe it to the victims and their families to listen to them, respect their experience and ensure that they are never forgotten. Today's apology must be more than words. It must be a reflection on the failures that have caused hurt and frustration. It must also be a commitment that future generations of victims and their families will be treated with the

respect, openness and support they deserve. The State cannot change the past but it can learn from it. It can acknowledge where people have been let down and can work to rebuild trust where it has been damaged.

I hope today's apology to the Stack family provides some measure of recognition for the pain they have carried for so long. While nothing can erase their loss, I hope it demonstrates that their voices have been heard and that Brian's memory continues to matter to this nation. On behalf of my constituents and my party, Independent Ireland, I extend my deepest sympathy to the Stack family and pay tribute to their perseverance and dignity. May the memory of Brian continue to be honoured and may today's proceedings help to ensure that victims and their families remain at the centre of our consideration in the years ahead.

Deputy Sean Fleming: Today is a very significant day for the Stack family. They have waited a very long time for the State to give a formal apology arising from the murder of Brian Stack, who was a well-regarded chief prison officer in Portlaoise for many years. To put it in a local context, since the foundation of the State, Portlaoise Prison has housed the most difficult people who were convicted of criminal offences. Anybody who does not appreciate the work of prison officers does not fully understand that they are in with these people, minding them and making sure they are kept inside the prison walls. They do this on behalf of society to make sure that we are safe. There is a community in Portlaoise of prison officers and generations of prison officers. Not only do we have Portlaoise Prison, but we also have the Midlands Prison. Side by side, they probably amount to the biggest prison complex in the country. There are over 1,000 prison officers in there today and there would be over 1,000 inmates in the prison as we speak. It is important that we have prisons for people who have shown total disregard for the law and that every effort is made by the State to protect prison officers, who have a very difficult job. It is a job that is carried out behind high walls, which is why the public does not fully appreciate what is involved in the work that prison officers do.

It is a very significant day for the Stack family. The Government has decided to make a formal apology on behalf of the State to the family of prison officer, Brian Stack. Why is the Government making this apology? The apology is for the mistakes, shortcomings and lack of due diligence by An Garda Síochána on several occasions over several years and its failure to carry out a proper investigation into who was responsible for the execution of Brian Stack. It behoves the State to continue the investigation. There may be information available that can lead to the proper identification of the persons involved. I know that Austin Stack and his brothers have met people and I am sure there are people out there who can provide more information. I ask that the State, which has made an apology, do everything possible to bring to justice those involved in that fatal shooting in Dublin so many years ago. I would also ask those people who know about this to come forward in conscience because it is never too late to do the right thing. Even though many years have passed, it is not too late.

The failed Garda investigation is an embarrassment to An Garda Síochána. It was looked at on so many occasions and it was a systemic failure. It was not just a failure by individual gardaí. It does not appear that there was a genuine concern and determination to bring the perpetrator to justice. Maybe there are reasons as to why that might be the case that we do not know in this House. However, there is never a wrong time to do the right thing.

Sheila Stack is originally a Donoghue from Portlaoise. She comes from a well-known family and I have known her for many years. She is a lovely lady. When we think about Brian Stack, we also have to think of Sheila, who had to take on the role of mother and father to their three sons, Austin, Oliver and Kieran. That was not an easy job and her hands were full, as we can understand, but she was never interviewed by An Garda Síochána. People in the prison who may have had information, including work colleagues of Brian Stack, were never interviewed. There were probably prisoners in Portlaoise Prison at the time who were aware of who was involved in this. These are examples of the total failure of the work by the Garda at that time. One would hope that situations like that would never recur in relation to any serious murder case like this.

Bear in mind that he was the only prison officer murdered during the troubled times. It is easy for us to think about this, but people should realise how difficult life was for the Garda Síochána at the time dealing with the Troubles, and for the prison officers dealing with the trouble-makers when they were convicted because they had their links with outside colleagues and things continued.

I compliment the Taoiseach and the wider Government for taking on board the great campaign by the Stack family. They family are to be praised for continuing this work. Other families may have given up years ago. It shows their determination, and I think it came down to genes. Austin has been a distinguished member of the Prison Service for a long number of years. It shows that these things run in families. They run deep and do not go away.

It is important that the Government made this apology today. I think it will go some way, but it does not fully solve the mystery of who carried out the murder. I ask that people do this.

It is a good day for the family, but it is a very poignant and sad day. All I can say to Sheila and the three children is that I know Brian is up there looking down on us. He is proud of you for working so hard and tirelessly in your campaign with the Government, which has rightly issued this formal apology on behalf of the State.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor): I, too, begin by extending my deepest sympathy to Sheila and her sons, Austin, Kieran and Oliver, who are in the Public Gallery. We are neighbours, as Deputy Fleming has said, in Graiguecullen in Laois. I commend the Stack family for their tireless campaign to uncover the truth of Brian's murder. Their determination, courage and resilience deserve our utmost respect. It should never have fallen to a family already devastated by the loss of a husband and father to fight for so long to obtain the answers and information they deserved. I commend them for keeping Brian's memory and legacy alive and for ensuring that his life and the circumstances of his death are not forgotten.

I warmly welcome today's State apology and acknowledge fully the serious failings in this case. This apology was long overdue, but I am glad it has been delivered today. I commend the Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, for acknowledging the State's failures and apologising to the Stack family. Brian Stack was a young man in the prime of his life going about an ordinary evening attending a boxing event at the National Stadium. His family have lived with the consequences ever since. State apologies are rare, and while they are not given lightly, they are sometimes necessary to acknowledge grave wrongs and failures. Today's apology is one such occasion. It cannot undo the pain, restore Brian's life or erase the years of uncertainty

endured by his family, but it is an important recognition of what went wrong and of the injustice that the Stack family have experienced. I hope today brings Sheila, Austin, Kieran and Oliver some acknowledgement and comfort that they have shown extraordinary strength in ensuring that Brian's name and legacy endure. They deserve the answers, they deserve accountability, and today, at long last, their suffering and campaign have been publicly acknowledged.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: I also welcome the State apology to the family of Brian Stack. Brian Stack was shot in the back of the head by the IRA in 1983. Brian was a loved husband and father of three children. His killing was devastating for his family and friends, and no greater disaster can befall a young family than the killing of a parent. Ireland was experiencing difficult times during the Troubles. The North was in convulsions, but even under these heartbreaking scenarios, the killing of Brian Stack shocked people across the Thirty-two Counties. I understand that Brian was the only prison officer killed during the Troubles. The victims and survivors of these shocking killings should be entitled to justice and truth. This is especially true for anybody who was working in the service of the State. The fact that justice and truth have been denied to the Stack family is absolutely wrong. The primary responsibility for this lies with the people who pulled the trigger and with the IRA.

Nationalists and republicans rightly fight for truth for the hundreds of nationalists and republicans who were killed by the British state, but equally there is a responsibility on the IRA and republicans to make sure that people who were killed at their hands receive truth and justice as well.

There is an incredible responsibility that lies with the State, given that Brian was in the service of the State. That there is no real truth recovery process in the State is a serious mistake, given how long time has travelled since the Good Friday Agreement.

That there were three separate Garda investigations into Brian's killing is incredible. It is unbelievable that so many investigations have happened. A review into the first investigation showed that there were 194 errors and omissions. There was physical evidence and that physical evidence has not been used to facilitate a proper investigation. That is outrageous. It is important for the State to look at itself in relation to this and make sure that it can never happen again. I understand that the Stacks have looked for access to the review carried out into this but that that access was denied. That is also deeply problematic.

Cuirim fáilte mhór roimh an leithscéal seo ón Rialtas. Tá sé déanach. I ndáiríre, ba cheart go mbeadh sé ann deich mbliana ó shin. Ba cheart go mbeadh scéal agus nuacht fós le fáil ó phoblachtánaigh sa tír seo mar gheall ar cad a tharla ar an lá cinniúnach sin agus cad a tharla do Brian.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I begin my remarks by expressing my sincere apology as Minister for justice to Sheila, Austin, Kieran and Oliver - the Stack family - for the various failings documented by the Taoiseach in relation to the Garda investigation into the murder of chief officer Brian Stack. Brian Stack served the State during a time of great challenge and as Sheila, Austin, Kieran and Oliver have vividly described, his life was characterised by a belief in public service. His callous and cowardly murder by the Provisional IRA in 1984 in connection with his role in the Irish Prison Service at Portlaoise Prison was an attack both on the State and the spirit of public service that Brian

Stack embodied. Today, we remember Brian Stack not only as a victim of the Troubles, but alongside those members of An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces who, as public servants, made the ultimate sacrifice in service of the State during this time. As the Taoiseach has rightly said, this public service remains greatly valued. Regretfully, Brian Stack and his family have been let down by the State, and this has compounded the trauma they have experienced at the loss of a husband and a father. As Minister for justice, I am truly sorry for this.

Although the Garda authorities have assured me that their investigation remains open and that they continue to actively pursue live lines of inquiry in this regard, the failure to document potentially critical decisions during the original investigation in 1983 and 1984, and the loss of crucial evidence since then, have undoubtedly hampered the Garda's efforts to bring those responsible to justice. As time has passed since the Good Friday Agreement, these failings have made it impossible for the Stack family to move on, as they have explained to many of us in this Chamber. It is also clear that, both during the original investigation and in the years following, many of the failings for which the Government is apologising today arose from how An Garda Síochána communicated with the Stack family and kept them informed in the course of the criminal investigation. Although family liaison as we know it today in respect of serious crime was not yet an established concept in policing in Ireland during the 1980s, this cannot excuse or explain the many gaps and failures in communication that have taken place since then. It is difficult to reconcile aspects of what the Stack family were told about the investigation at various times in the 42 years since Brian Stack's murder with what they have uncovered themselves about those events. It is they who have been the constant in the pursuit of justice for Brian Stack and we owe them our gratitude for this, as well as our apology.

The events of recent weeks in Portadown remind us that the peace process on this island is ongoing. The conflict may have ended formally in 1998 but, for the bereaved and the injured, in particular, it remains a daily feature of their lives. Some of the measures that it took to secure that peace were painful for them to witness, and I know that this was the case for the Stack family, but those measures were accepted in a growing spirit of reconciliation and optimism for the future, which contrasts so starkly with the nihilism behind the murder of Brian Stack by the Provisional IRA.

The Stack family lived in peace before Brian's murder and were respected in their community in Laois and they have remained committed to the pursuit of justice, truth and accountability by lawful means since then in the knowledge that to open the door to the contemplation of any alternative would be to justify the pathway taken by those who did harm onto them and to others. Austin Stack was correct when he spoke of his mother, Sheila Stack, and the other bereaved like her who had suffered both in the conflict and in the peace that followed, as the real peacemakers.

Like Sheila Stack and her sons, we have to search for what is in our own hands to contribute to reconciliation and to address the legacy of the conflict on these islands. I have spoken before in this House about the need for contrition as we seek collectively to do so. As Austin Stack has set out, he and his family have faced many obstacles in their long journey to seek justice, truth and accountability for their beloved father and husband, Brian, and today, we as a Government are rightly apologising for the failings of the State and for the profound impact that these have had on the Stack family.

Sadly, this is but one side of the coin. The killers of Brian Stack remain at large, and this is a matter of deep regret to me. Only they can answer for pulling the trigger that night in March 1983. There are those with knowledge of these dark events that continue to deny this and their role, while the unlawful organisation responsible has only made partial admissions to its role in Brian Stack's murder and the perverse reasoning behind this.

The House will already be aware of this Government's commitment to addressing the legacy of the Troubles and the implementation of the joint framework on legacy agreed with the British Government. Fundamentally, this is about delivering truth, accountability and, where possible, justice to families like the Stack family. The House will have the opportunity to debate the legislative measures we are proposing to deliver this in the coming months through the legacy of the Troubles Bill.

Today, however, I call on anyone with knowledge of the events leading to the murder of Brian Stack to show contrition and the values of peace embodied by the Stack family throughout their lives, and give that knowledge to the authorities in recognition of the pain that the Stack family continue to endure.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That concludes our statements. I again thank the Stack family for being present during the statements. I join with all of the other speakers in what they have said. As the Minister has said, the killers of Brian Stack are still at large and anyone who has knowledge should come forward. I thank all the Members who contributed.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 2.53 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 3.55 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 2.53 p.m. and resumed at 3.55 p.m.

Defence (Amendment) Bill 2026: Second Stage

Minister for Defence (Deputy Helen McEntee): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I am pleased to present the Bill to the House today. At the outset, I want to again acknowledge the members of our Defence Forces and thank them for the work they do in keeping us safe at home, but in particular, given this debate, to acknowledge, recognise and thank them for their significant contribution to peacekeeping missions for many decades.

I have set out in recent weeks, both in this House and in the Seanad just last week, why the changes contained in this Bill are necessary, but it is important to do so again today. It is well known that the triple lock is the legal mechanism that governs the deployment of our Defence Forces personnel overseas as part of an international force. We currently require a UN Security Council mandate, Government approval and Dáil approval to deploy any number of Defence Forces personnel overseas as part of that international force. Whether it is one person, 20 people or 50 people, any person overseas requires all three. Clear examples of international forces are the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, UNIFIL, Operation IRINI, which we have had to leave, and Operation Althea. These are the types of missions where our troops are currently engaging in peacekeeping, peace enforcement and force protection.

What is also the case at the moment is that any one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council can decide to withdraw its support for any of the current UN peacekeeping missions or, as we have seen over many years, can prevent a new peacekeeping mission from being established. To spell that out even more bluntly, France, the UK, China, the US and Russia currently decide and have a role in where we take part and how we contribute to certain international missions. Russia, a country that is bombing, murdering and maiming innocent civilians every single day in Ukraine and that is attacking European member states, including Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland, all in the last few months, has a say over which peacekeeping missions we can send our troops to or where we can keep our troops.

This is what goes to the heart of the debate. That five countries across the world, or any country, can have any say in where we send our troops is crazy. We need to change this. The changes contained in this Bill are necessary if we want to ensure that, as a sovereign country, we have the independence and ability to make our own decisions about where we deploy our troops. Most importantly, these changes are necessary if we want Ireland to continue being a force for good in the world, which I believe we all do. Without the independence to make these decisions, we are more limited than ever before. We can do less to defend human rights around the world, and we are reliant on the political decisions of others when making these important decisions. No other country in the world has this mechanism. No other country in the world allows another country or a superpower to decide for it.

The alternative is that we maintain the *status quo* and wait for one of the permanent five to withdraw its support for further UN missions that we are a part of. Again, I think this is getting lost in the debate. The question is asked why we are not exploring UN-mandated missions that currently exist, or why we are not looking to expand and increase our numbers there. Of course we are. However, there is nothing to stop any one of the permanent five members from withdrawing its support for any of those missions at any given time in the same way they have with Lebanon and Operation IRINI.

The choice here is simple. The Government and I, as Minister, working with the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, and many others, want to fix what is broken. Importantly, we want to ensure that the right to decide where we send our troops remains firmly with the democratically elected representatives of this country, not with Vladimir Putin or anybody else. The changes we are proposing are consistent with the principles of the UN Charter and international law. The changes in this legislation mean that legal, military and policy advice will support any decision about future overseas deployments, and changes proposed in this legislation will not in any way affect our long-standing policy of military neutrality.

There is a reason that at no stage in our country's history have we enshrined our neutrality or the triple lock in the Constitution. Successive Governments and successive decisions have all recognised that, as a country, we need to remain responsive and agile to the world around us because we are not immune to risk. Putting neutrality in our Constitution would undoubtedly prevent us from engaging in any meaningful way with other countries on our security or on defence matters, and that is not who we are.

4 o'clock

We are a neutral country, but we are also a country that contributes to peace and security on these islands and further afield. Those two are not mutually exclusive. I have been clear from

the outset that I want to engage with colleagues who want to work constructively, as I know they do. I spoke with many of them when we attended the RACO yearly event in the last 24 hours. I want to work with colleagues who want to support the role of our Defence Forces overseas and who want to ensure that Ireland has legislation that allows us to continue to contribute positively to peace.

Unfortunately, we have heard few meaningful solutions from the Opposition in recent weeks and months when it comes to ensuring that Ireland is the country that decides where we send our troops, not Russia, America, China, Britain or France. There have been no serious answers to the questions of what we do about the Security Council veto. I put it to the Opposition that there is nothing neutral about allowing another country to decide where we send our troops. Allowing other countries to dictate where we send our troops simply allows superpowers to have their interests reflected in what should be Irish decisions.

The triple lock is not working. It does not reflect the changed global environment that we live in. The changes in this legislation aim to address this in a manner that will allow us to deploy our personnel in defence of the principles of the UN Charter and international law. The primary purpose of this Bill is to consolidate with amendments the existing provisions of the Defence Acts 1954 to 2015 concerning the dispatch of members of the Defence Forces for services outside of the State. Most significantly, it reforms what we have all known as the triple lock mechanism, providing the legal mechanisms governing the dispatch of our Defence Forces on peacekeeping missions as part of an international United Nations force. The Bill also updates the other purposes outside service as part of an international force for which Defence Forces personnel may be deployed overseas. In particular, it provides expressly for the evacuation of Irish citizens from unstable or dangerous security environments. We have seen an increase in these kinds of environments and situations. It also provides for military close protection duties when the President or members of the Government are travelling abroad in a potentially hostile environment or area of conflict. Recent years, weeks and months have demonstrated why we need these capabilities and why there should be a clear legislative basis for them.

The Bill also deals with another area of important reform. It amends the Defence Act 1954 to provide for the suspension of members of the Defence Forces, giving effect to the recommendations contained in the report prepared by Mr. Peter S. Ward SC on the management of Defence Forces personnel charged with or convicted of serious criminal offences, which was published in December 2024. These provisions are an important part of the continuing transformation of the defence culture of our Defence Forces. I am confident that Deputies across this House will recognise that these are sensible and indeed necessary provisions.

I want to touch again on the crux of our debate. I will give some concrete examples because people at home want to understand what we are talking about and what it means to currently have the triple lock and to potentially reform it. Operation Irini provides one clear example. In May, the UN authorisation underpinning Operation Irini, which is an EU naval operation in the Mediterranean supporting the implementation of the United Nations embargo on Libya, was not renewed. Our four defence personnel had to withdraw immediately. The EU mission itself continued. Personnel from the 23 other participating countries remained. Ireland had to leave because our domestic legislation required the UN authorisation. The Irish Government continued to support their participation and our personnel were making valuable contributions,

which I know from speaking to three of them a day before they had to leave, but our law required them to withdraw. This is the reality that we need to address. For many years our own troops contributed to this operation and we gained from that operation, but because of a decision of another country, one of the five permanent members, we had to leave while every other member state stayed.

While many people may not be familiar with Operation Irini, everyone is aware of Ireland's peacekeeping role in Lebanon. Irish personnel have served with UNIFIL for almost five decades. Generation after generation of Irish soldier has served there. The contribution of our peacekeepers has defined the history of our Defence Forces for the past 50 years. UNIFIL's current mandate provides for the conclusion of its operations by 31 December this year. Without reform of our legislation, our ability to contribute meaningfully to peacekeeping in Lebanon in the way that we have done for decades will be severely constrained. While we are considering and agreed just last week at the EU Foreign Affairs Council a role that will develop and play out in Lebanon after UNIFIL, following proposals which Ireland was involved in, under our existing legislation there would be significant limitations on the contribution Ireland could make to a mission that did not have the necessary UN mandate. Specifically, with the role that we currently have, our members would not be able to take part in many similar missions, in positions that they are trained for, because of the triple lock. This is a clear, real, live reason we need to change and to reform our triple lock. It is absolutely essential. I am committed to working with all Members in this House to find a way forward so that we can continue to support our troops and, most importantly, make our own decisions about where we send our troops and do not allow other countries to make those decisions for us.

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Thomas Byrne): The general scheme of this Bill has been subject to considerable scrutiny. In line with normal practices, it was referred to the Oireachtas committee for pre-legislative scrutiny. The committee members worked well on that, and a wide range of views were expressed. The Government has listened to those views and to the stakeholders who participated in the process. We have considered the recommendations and we have taken a number of them on board. The Minister will be required to make an annual report on overseas deployments available to the Oireachtas. Written notification will be provided to the relevant joint committee where a contingent of 50 or fewer are deployed and the purposes for which a contingent may be deployed as part of an international force will explicitly include peace enforcement, as was mentioned by the joint committee.

Changes have also been made to the provisions concerning the suspension of members of the Defence Forces and the dismissal of officers, ensuring that fair procedures apply, and that the circumstances in which suspension or dismissal may arise are clearly set out in the Bill. We will also bring forward an amendment on Committee Stage to ensure that the provisions of the Army Pensions Act apply to members of the Defence Forces deployed outside the State as part of an international force.

Let us go through the Bill. Sections 1 to 3 in Part 1 are standard sections. Section 3 provides for the repeal of the existing legislation concerning the dispatch for service of members of the Defence Forces outside the State, which is the Defence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1960 and the Defence (Amendment) Act 2006.

Section 4 is really the crux of it. It amends section 2 of the Defence Act 1954 to include a definition for the term "relevant international force", which replaces the term "International United Nations Force" as defined in the Defence (Amendment) Act 2006. This is the change. We are changing from "International United Nations Force" to "relevant international force". The insertion of "relevant international force" is what the reform of the triple lock actually means in practice. It means that the Defence Forces can continue to participate in UN-led or UN-organised missions. If the United Nations Security Council changes its mind and starts to authorise new peacekeeping missions, we can still take part and that mandate will do us. It will also allow the Defence Forces to participate in missions organised or led by, for example, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, OSCE, the EU or other regional arrangements. The participation of the Defence Forces in any such mission would only occur where it operates in a manner consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and international law. That is what we are voting on - not the histrionics from the Opposition, not the exaggerations, not war and not neutrality. This is exactly what we are voting on.

Sections 5 to 10 and 13 to 20 provide for consequential amendments to the Defence Act 1954, necessitated by the repeal of existing enactments dating back to 1916 to 2006. In the case of a number of these consequential amendments, references to the repealed enactments are replaced with references to the relevant new sections of the Defence Act 1954. Section 7 applies to officers and section 11 applies to enlisted persons and will amend the Defence Act 1954 to provide for the suspension in certain circumstances of members of the Defence Forces. These proposals come from the Ward report, which was mentioned by the Minister. The section sets out the circumstances in which a member of the Defence Forces may be suspended and the procedures to be followed, including the right to make representations. The section also enables the Minister to make regulations pertaining to suspensions.

Section 8 amends the provisions as set out in section 50 of the Defence Act relating to the dismissal of an officer of the Defence Forces. The reasons that may give rise to the dismissal are that the officer has been convicted of a criminal offence, that the officer has engaged in conduct that has brought discredit to the Defence Forces, or that the dismissal is necessary for the purpose of safeguarding national security.

Section 9, which is about officers, and section 12, which is about enlisted persons, amend the Defence Act 1954, again in line with recommendations from the Ward report, to require a member of the Defence Forces to inform his or her commanding officer if the member is charged with a criminal offence. The member will also be required to keep the commanding officer informed of any significant developments relating to the charge, including the dates of court appearances.

Section 21 inserts a new Part XIV into the Defence Act 1954. The new Part XIV, which consists of six new sections, consolidates the provisions relating to the service outside the State by a contingent or member of the Defence Forces which are currently situated within the Defence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1960 and the Defence (Amendment) Act 2006.

The new section 336 of the Defence Act 1954 relates to the dispatch of a contingent or member of the Defence Forces for service outside the State as part of a "relevant international force". This is one of the central provisions of the Bill. The legislation expressly provides that any dispatch of a contingent or member, as part of a relevant international force, which I have already described the definition of, shall be subject to that international force operating "for the

purpose of peace-keeping, peace-enforcement or conflict prevention consistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations". That is what we are voting on.

Subsection (2) of the new section 336 provides that a contingent of the Defence Forces will not be dispatched, as part of a relevant international force, other than with the prior approval of the Government, and, subject to certain exceptions as set out in this section, only if a resolution approving the dispatch has been passed by the Dáil.

Subsection (5) of the new section 336 sets out the circumstances in which a contingent of the Defence Forces may be dispatched outside the State for service as part of a relevant international force without a Dáil Éireann resolution. The circumstances are that "the contingent consists of not more than 50 members of the Defence Forces", or the contingent is being dispatched for the purposes of replacing, in whole or in part, a contingent that was previously approved for dispatch. The Defence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1960 currently allows for the dispatch of a contingent of not more than 12 members of the Defence Forces without a resolution approving the dispatch having been passed by Dáil Éireann. This is one of the key mistakes people make regarding the triple lock. The specification of the 12 members and the 50 members has nothing to do with the United Nations or a mandate. One member of the Defence Forces going abroad previously had to have a UN mandate and now will have to be part of a relevant international force. The 12 members and the 50 members relates to Dáil Éireann approval, and that is the legislation and the law.

The increase to 50 in the number of personnel that may be dispatched without a Dáil resolution - they will still need to be part of a relevant international force - will allow for the deployment of a number constituting a military platoon with support elements, such as communications, transport and other support elements.

The new section 337 of the Defence Act 1954 deals with the dispatch of a contingent or member of the Defence Forces for service outside the State for purposes other than service as part of a relevant international force. The following new purposes are included: "undertaking civilian evacuation operations in response to an actual or potential disaster or emergency" and "undertaking military close protection duties or military security duties". The provision relating to civilian evacuation operations is particularly important. We live in a time of geopolitical instability. When Irish citizens are caught in high-risk or volatile environments overseas, Ireland must have the capacity to respond. Our Defence Forces need a clear legal basis to do the job we may ask them to do in undertaking civilian evacuation. This is why the Bill makes express provision in the Defence Acts for the deployment of members of the Defence Forces outside the State for those purposes. The term "military close protection duties" relates to the provision of "personal security duties carried out in an actual or potential hostile environment or area of conflict" in respect of persons including the President and members of the Government, as specified in subsection (5) of section 337. The reference to "military security duties" is intended to cover the provision of security support to Irish embassies in high-risk or volatile security environments. Any dispatch of members of the Defence Forces under this section will be with the prior approval, and on the authority of, the Government. However, in line with an existing provision of the Defence (Amendment) Act 2006, the Government will be authorised to give general approval for the dispatch of the Defence Forces for any purpose set out in subsection (1), other than dispatch for civilian

evacuation operations, or the provision of military close protection or military security duties. Dispatch for these purposes will require Government approval on a case-by-case basis.

We also have a new section 338, which is a very interesting one as well. This provides that "A State ship or service aircraft may, with the prior approval of the Government, be deployed outside the State for the purpose of participating in international activities to counter drug trafficking by sea and air". This is primarily intended to facilitate greater participation by Ireland in the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre (Narcotics), MAOC(N), of which Ireland is a founder member. If we look back at the record, we will see that a previous Minister for Defence said we would provide equipment for this intergovernmental or interstate operation. We were not able to do so because of the triple lock, even though it relates to drug trafficking. This will give us legislation that will allow us to do that. This is really important for us. We are a founder member of the centre. They asked us for equipment in 2017, but we could not because of the existing legislation even though we are a founder member of the centre and it is about drug trafficking.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Minister of State. Everybody present has your speech. I appreciate he has more to go through.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am happy to go through other sections, if people have questions, because there are some others to go through.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Earlier today at the RACO conference, the Minister suggested that people had put their trust in politicians to bring in changes in particular to the triple lock neutrality protection. That is despite the fact that no reference whatsoever was made to it in the Minister's own party manifesto. It is despite the fact that the Fianna Fáil manifesto merely spoke about reform, rather than ending it. Most of all, it is despite the fact that commitments were twice given to the Irish people in the Nice and Lisbon treaty referendums that the triple lock would be a permanent feature and a protection for our neutrality. When people went to the polls on those occasions, many of them changed their minds from the first referendum to the second on the basis of what Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael presented as being binding commitments. Now, they say that the triple lock has nothing to do with neutrality, even though we are literally amending the parts of our Defence Acts that relate to deploying Irish personnel as part of an international force.

For a long time it was the policy of the Government that the triple lock was central to neutrality. I will quote Micheál Martin. I think he is sick of being quoted but it is no harm to say once again that he said that "the triple lock is at the core of our neutrality" and spoke about a Fine Gael "obsession". I will also quote from the Minister's departmental website, which states:

> Ireland’s policy of military neutrality has long been an important strand of our independent foreign policy and is characterised by non-membership of military alliances or common or mutual defence arrangements.

That is uncontroversial, but more interestingly it says:

> Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality is well understood by EU partners and codified in the Protocol attached to the Lisbon Treaty.

That is the Lisbon treaty that the Irish people voted for on the basis of that protocol. According to the Minister's own departmental website, the triple lock is central to our neutrality and the protocol is fundamentally premised on the triple lock. The Minister knows perfectly well the Irish people want to keep our neutrality and that they want to keep the triple lock, and she knows that she does not have a mandate for this legislation. If she was so certain of her position, given such past commitments in particular, and if she is so certain of this argument she makes in terms of sovereignty, she should put it to the people. The reason she refuses to do so is because she knows it will be rejected. The Minister cannot very well put such store in arguments around sovereignty and pretend such votes did not really take place.

Indeed, she is trying to truncate the debate in here. It would be perfectly normal and in order to have this debate continue into the following week. There is nothing stopping the Minister adjourning this debate at the end of this evening's part, but the reality is that she knows there are many within Government, particularly in Fianna Fáil, who have serious reservations about this Bill, because they are proud of the historical record of peacekeeping and of multilateralism, and they see Fine Gael, Micheál Martin and the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, rushing to get rid of it. The Minister is trying to keep a tight rein on this debate.

The Minister tells us that the world is changing. That is not disputed. The world is undoubtedly changing. We see the profound instability in this world, with Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, the continued Israeli occupation of Gaza and settler violence in the West Bank, the US and Israeli war with Iran, the Sudanese war, and now the conflict between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia. The response to this volatility should not be to cast aside the protections that we have. The Government proposes to dip its toes. It should be wary that the tides are very strong. What the Government proposes to do is risky, reckless and foolish. It puts Irish Governments in the future at risk of considerable pressure for deployments - of what kind, we do not know.

Before I return to the triple lock itself, I will briefly state that it is important that this legislation is also dealing with disciplinary issues and suspensions. I have no objection in principle to this. I acknowledge that changes have been made to the general scheme. That is welcome, but they require additional consideration. We will engage with the amendment the Minister of State has mentioned. It is the first reference we have heard to it. We will engage with that as it comes forward.

There have been a lot of myths in relation to this debate and it is important to take them one by one.

The first, is in relation to the constant argument about the veto. The reality is, in the triple lock, neutrality protection exists. It exists in the Seville declaration, particularly at Ireland's request, but fundamentally it exists in the Defence Acts. It exists in Acts of these Houses. That is where the triple lock exists. It is the threshold and the standard the Oireachtas has set for the deployment of Irish troops so that it has a UN mandate and that it has a strong grounding in international law. I too acknowledge the very proud record of Irish peacekeepers who have served with distinction, who have brought great pride to Ireland and who have enhanced the reputation of Ireland internationally. I also acknowledge the fact many personnel lost their

lives and were severely injured during their service. Those peacekeepers have done us proud. They did so under a UN mandate.

There are currently ten other UN peacekeeping missions, aside from UNIFIL, and that is even before we go into the upwards of a dozen other missions supported by UN Security Council resolutions for certain activities and UN mandates. There is not a shortage of locations to deploy Irish personnel to but the Government is not interested in that; it is even exploring it. Right now, all the Government's eggs are in this basket and the deployments it proposes to undertake outside of a UN mandate. The Government has also attempted to suggest the triple lock constrains us in so many different ways regarding our personnel abroad. The triple lock specifically relates to being part of an international force. The reality is that it does not, and never has, prevented us from, for example, postings outside the State, secondments, training, ceremonial duties, monitoring observation, reconnaissance and fact-finding, inspecting and evaluation of equipment, undertaking military close protection or military security duty duties, undertaking humanitarian tasks, evacuation and the protection of Irish citizens. The Minister proposed to clarify that in the legislation. That is fine. It looked clear enough to me in the 2006 Act but if she wishes to clarify that, that is fine. Ultimately, that is not what this legislation is about. If the Government had proposed legislation that did solely that, I would have no objection. Ultimately, the Government is using these arguments as cover to get rid of the triple lock.

The Government has also attempted, at times, to connect getting rid of the triple lock with investing in our Defence Forces, but it is this and previous Governments that have failed to invest. We should have a Government that is strong on neutrality and strong on defence. This Government is neither. We must properly resource the Defence Forces by rebuilding the Naval Service, strengthening air and maritime surveillance and developing adequate radar capabilities. Neutrality does not mean being defenceless.

It also does not mean dependence and reliance on others. The weakness in our defence has been created by decades of underinvestment by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Instead of fixing that failure, the Government prefers closer alignment with military structures of NATO states. We read recently that the Government is directing officials to progress Irish participation as an observer in the joint expeditionary force, JEF+, which puts this in a concerning context, on top of the fact there was a deployment of a British warship reportedly during the Irish Presidency's hosting of the European Defence Ministers' meeting at the request of the Irish Government, which has also raised serious concerns.

We should invest in our Defence Forces rather than becoming dependent and reliant on neighbours, particularly NATO member states. It would be more in the Government's line if it was serious about defence, to address the delayed timelines in the Commission on the Defence Forces report, perhaps, most of all, to meet the needs of the Defence Forces' greatest assets - the men and women of the Defence Forces. As the Minister heard at the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers, RACO, conference, officers were rostered to work during that very Ministers' meeting and not paid an allowance despite the fact they were working around the clock. The very people we are relying on did not get that allowance. This is a matter of basic respect. We have Defence Forces personnel not being paid for the work they are doing because there is no way of recording overtime and we have the issue of the inadequate cadet pay. I urge the Minister, Deputy Chambers, to stop blocking the appointment

of an adjudicator to the Defence Forces scheme and stop delaying the processing of local bargaining schemes under the previous national pay agreement.

The European Economic and Social Committee has found against the Government for its failure to properly pay our Defence Forces and abide by the working time directive. The Minister needs to direct her Department to fix this. That would be far more in her line than getting rid of the triple lock.

Neutrality has been a strength for Ireland. It is a clear-eyed assessment of how Ireland can best play a role in this world. We enjoy a unique position, being seen by countries of the global south as having overcome conflict and a history of colonialism but also having strong connections of history, language and family with countries such as the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Britain, as well as being an EU country. It gives us an outsized level of influence but this has been allied to and buttressed by our military neutrality and our support for the multilateral system. We are a small nation. We will never be a major military power but neutrality allows us to create a place in the world not swept along by one or other of the tides of the great powers. We are well able to stand on our own two feet. This illustrates all the more why neutrality is vitally important at this time. The Government's attempts to get rid of the triple lock are foolish and reckless and we should oppose them at every step.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Let us be crystal-clear: defending Irish neutrality does not mean turning our backs on the world. It means pursuing peace through diplomacy, supporting humanitarian efforts, standing up for international law and refusing to become entangled in military arrangements that compromise our independence. The people of Ireland have a legitimate interest in these decisions and any fundamental change to the triple lock deserves serious public debate, transparency and democratic consent, not a rushed legislative process.

One of the concerns with the Bill, and not just specifically from a policy perspective, are the powers given to Government alone regarding the dispatch of Defence Forces personnel for purposes other than service as part of a relevant international force. The Government may decide to send advisers overseas without Dáil approval. If Irish soldiers are to advise the military of any other foreign power, the Dáil must be consulted in order to judge the suitability of who we are advising. Not only is this for the purpose of maintaining our international reputation, for integrity and credibility, but military advisers have all too often in the past been a precursor or a catalyst for involvement in a much larger conflict. Let us consider the Americans in Vietnam or the Soviets in Afghanistan. We cannot allow the government of the day to simply pick and choose who it thinks we should be advising or aiding in military matters. Not every so-called ally or partner has a reputation for upholding international law or defending human rights. We must be careful who we call on our Defence Forces to not only stand beside but work with to build up their military capabilities.

I have a similar concern about undertaking reconnaissance missions without the approval of the Dáil. Reconnaissance by its very nature means the proximity to or close contact with a potentially hostile presence. How far could the definition of "reconnaissance" be stretched by a Government? Could the cavalry troopers be sent to reconnaissance in force, bringing them into direct conflict with an opposing force? Could the rangers wing be sent to conduct an operating under the guise of a special reconnaissance mission? These two liberties given to the

Government are in stark contrast to the other provisions in section 337 and I worry that they are wide open to abuse.

This is something we must tighten up as a matter of urgency. There can be no room for semantics when it comes the dispatch of Irish troops to potentially conflict-ridden zones. The Government was very sure to explicitly define itself as eligible to receive close protection by the Defence Forces so it can be quite clear when it needs to be. The Government must scrap this scheme to repeal the triple lock. Ireland's contribution to international security should continue to be rooted in peacekeeping, neutrality and respect for the United Nations. For generations, Ireland has built a profound reputation as a nation committed to peace, diplomacy and the peaceful resolution of conflict. We should be proud of that tradition, defend it and pass it on to future generations.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: The Ministers might not think the triple lock is something the public is engaged in but I assure them they are critically engaged. The vast majority are requesting their public representatives to vote against this Bill and that is why Sinn Féin will vote against it. Every time the triple lock is talked about there is what is like an annoyance or a frustration with the Irish people that they do not get it. There is an anger coming from the Government-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: There is not.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: -----as to why people would question the triple lock or what they want. One person sums this up really well. Our neutrality is a core part of who we are. For decades, it has allowed our Defence Forces to do incredible independent, peacekeeping and humanitarian work across the world without being dragged into global conflicts. Stripping away the requirement of a UN mandate takes away the essential checks and balances that protect our troops and independence. Pushing a massive change like this through without proper public debate is completely unacceptable.

If the Government truly believes our foreign policy needs to be altered, then it must put that question directly to the people of Ireland. A decision that alters our national identity cannot be made by a simple Dáil vote. At the very least, we must have a national referendum. Sinn Féin and I completely oppose these attempts to abolish the triple lock. The Government will say that it has nothing to do with our neutrality. Well, then, all the Irish people are wrong.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The Deputy is telling them it is about war.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot have interruptions.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: Let the Government be on its own. As Chair of the defence and national security committee, I have a job to do to facilitate all members of the committee, and I will do that. I want to be absolutely clear. Protecting Ireland's neutrality and strengthening our Defence Forces are not mutually exclusive. The Government would have people believe that the triple lock is somehow preventing Ireland from playing its part internationally and is something we need to be ashamed of. This is not the case.

Our personnel can participate in international military training, undertaking humanitarian operations of any size, responding to natural disasters and emergencies and engaging in overseas activities that do not require triple lock approval. They can go on rescue missions and do all of those things. The Irish people know that; they are not stupid. We can strengthen our maritime security, protect our undersea infrastructure, improve our cybersecurity, invest in air surveillance and enhance our capacity to respond to emerging threats. We can improve military readiness, modernise equipment, invest in our barracks and, crucially, address the recruitment and retention crisis that continues to undermine our Defence Forces. Not one of those priorities requires the abolition of the triple lock.

The real obstacle to strengthening our Defence Forces are decades of underinvestment, inadequate infrastructure and the failure of successive Governments to properly support the men and the women who serve our State. I want to take this opportunity today to thank each and every one of those who has served and continues to serve.

The triple lock is not responsible for the crumbling barracks or the personnel shortages. Yet, rather than tackling these challenges, the Government has chosen to dismantle an important safeguard of Irish neutrality as its priority. Let us be honest with the people around the triple lock. It ensures that certain overseas deployments require Government and Dáil approval and a United Nations mandate. Its removal would fundamentally change the safeguards governing Ireland's participation in overseas military operations. It would transfer greater discretion to the Government of the day, weakening an important democratic and international check. This has serious implications for our neutrality, and the Irish people deserve honesty about those implications. The Government is acting against their expressed wishes.

I recognise the genuine difficulties facing the United Nations Security Council, but the answer to a dysfunctional Security Council is not to abandon the UN framework. The answer is to reform it. Ireland should be leading international efforts to reform the council, to challenge the misuse of the veto, to strengthen accountability and to ensure that international peacekeeping is not paralysed by geopolitical interests. We should be using our diplomatic influence to build alliances for meaningful UN reform, not just using its shortcomings as an excuse to remove safeguards at home.

Ireland's military neutrality has given us a distinctive and respected voice internationally. It allows us to advocate for peace, diplomacy, international law and conflict resolution, independent of military alliances. That independence is worth protecting, and the people living on this island think it is worth protecting. Sinn Féin will oppose the Minister’s attempts to abolish the triple lock, invest in our Defence Forces, reform the United Nations and protect our neutrality. If the Government insists on fundamentally changing the safeguards underpinning our neutrality, it should put it to the people in a referendum. If it is not brave enough to let the Irish people have their say, then it should stand aside and let a Government that will do so.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: The Social Democrats strongly oppose this Bill, but not all elements of it. As Deputy Ó Laoghairepointed out, there are some important parts of it regarding disciplinary procedures and so on. However, the removal of the triple lock is an erosion of our neutrality. Although the Government will not admit that, that is the basis on which we oppose this Bill. The Taoiseach called it "reform" earlier, and in their opening comments the Minister and Minister of State have used the term “reform”. It is not reform, and therefore, the

Government has no mandate. It is the abolition of the triple lock. It is the removal of the triple lock, with no comparable replacement, and I am going to get into some detail on that.

The Government has no mandate. Fine Gael, in its manifesto for the 2024 election, was silent on this. Fianna Fáil talked about sensible reform. The programme for Government refers to reform while maintaining Irish neutrality, which this Bill does not do. I will refer to some of the experts who have testified to that in committee. I have criticised the Minister of State, Deputy Richmond for his position in not supporting Irish neutrality, but I have come around to the fact that at least he is open and transparent about it because that is less than I can say for the rest of the Fine Gael Cabinet members and TDs who speak on this issue. They do not support neutrality. They never have and never will, as long as they are in power. The Bill finally puts the nail in the coffin of Irish neutrality and allows Fine Gael to pursue its goals, namely, to drag us towards militarisation along with its EPP partners.

Fianna Fáil has at least in the past had strong support for Irish neutrality, going back decades with people like Frank Aitken who was instrumental in the development of Irish foreign policy and the multilateralism that is a cornerstone of that. Of course, this is why we are seeing a schism in the Fianna Fáil membership, whereby some of its TDs are seeing through the Government spin and recognise that this is an absolute nail in the coffin of Irish neutrality. I urge the rest of its Deputies to please tune in to and listen to the debate and hear what the Opposition is saying.

The Opposition is completely united and is working together to open the eyes of the public, who are with us on this, and those of the Government Deputies who are being hoodwinked by the Cabinet spin. The cross-party work on this has been incredibly strong. I am proud to be a part of the Irish Neutrality League, along with Members present today and others. Of course, Catherine Connolly, before she was elected to Áras an Uachtaráin, was a founder of the Irish Neutrality League.

I want to get past the politics and into some of the policy of this and have a look at what is being proposed by the Government because that is important. The Bill is suggesting that we go from a clear legal mechanism, which acts as a backstop for Irish neutrality in the deployment of our troops, to what will essentially be a set of vague words and terms that do not have legal standing and that will inform our military deployment policy. There will be no comparable legal certainty.

I will address the Minister's call for other ways in which we could satisfy the triple lock. Ultimately, what the Bill will do is bring us from peacekeeping to military deployment for regional interests. One of the most tangible examples of this change is what I heard during the pre-legislative scrutiny debate in the defence committee. In an exchange between Deputy Murphy and the Minister's Department's head of defence and security policy, the Deputy asked the Minister's colleague, who is here with us today, whether if the legal framework being proposed in the Bill was in place in 2003 there would have been anything stopping us from sending troops to invade Iraq. The answer was "No". There would have been nothing in place for us to stop it. There would have been no legal backstop and no triple lock to prevent the Government of the day potentially sending troops to Iraq. It was startling to hear that, because the UK and the US claimed at the time that what they did was in compliance with the UN Charter, which is exactly what the Government is trying to replace our triple lock with, namely, adherence to the UN Charter, a term so vague that it is meaningless.

Trite phrases like the "UN Charter" mean nothing when those kinds of invasion are overseen without UN oversight. That is the point. The UN mandate is the only show in town when it comes to multilateralism and the Government is choosing to remove it. This Bill will allow missions with no UN mandate as long as they are "consistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations" but who is to determine if a regional organisation or body operates in a manner consistent with the UN Charter, especially when there is no Security Council or General Assembly oversight? That is the role of the UN and it is a role the Government is actively seeking to erode.

I will speak to some of the missions that have been referenced throughout the debates on the triple lock and this specific Bill. There has been a lot of misrepresentation of those missions and the missions the Government purportedly wants to go on, so I will delve into some of them. At Leaders' Questions earlier, the Taoiseach made great statements about how Irish troops had been instrumental in delivering humanitarian aid to Chad. I agree, but the Government's proposed non-triple lock missions have no humanitarian functions - not in the new functions for Operation IRINI and not in the EU missions in Lebanon. The new Lebanon mission - we have to clarify this - is not a peacekeeping mission. This is not hyperbole or hysterics. The EU mission does not have a peacekeeping function. It is a training mission to train the Lebanese military. The main similarity it has with UNIFIL is simply that it takes place in Lebanon.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: And we currently do not need the triple lock for that.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: We only need to look at the disaster of the EU training mission in Mali to see the problem with these kinds of mission but crucial to the discussion on this Bill is that these are not peacekeeping missions.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Just on a point of information that does not currently require-----

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: Please let me finish.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are not points of information. This is a debate.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: Now I would like to talk about the-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: There is disinformation being thrown out here.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy did not interrupt the Minister of State and he should not interrupt her.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: But it is disinformation.

An Ceann Comhairle: Keep going Deputy Gibney, please.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I will address the non-renewal of mandates because that is one of the key points that the Government puts forward around this. Have there been any new UN-founded missions since 2014? The answer is "No" and we all know that. However, have there been mandate renewals and mandates for regional missions? The answer is "Yes". These include Operation Sophia for search and rescue in the Mediterranean and enforcing the Libyan arms embargo, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, UNDOF, peacekeeping mission in the Golan Heights, which Ireland pulled out of in 2024, and the Haiti mission that was approved by the Security Council in 2023 and began in 2024. The Government's dialogue around this is an attempt to misdirect the Irish public. It cannot get a mandate from the UN for peacekeeping, so it is going to get rid of the triple lock so that it can send troops on non-peacekeeping missions with no UN mandate. There are 11 UN peacekeeping missions currently. There are also more missions globally that have a UN mandate, such as the Haiti mission. The new Lebanon mission is not a peacekeeping mission, so how exactly is our peacekeeping tradition being protected?

In the few minutes I have left, I want to pick up on some of the points that the Minister and Minister of State made in their opening statements. The Minister specifically asked us for alternatives. The Government says it is looking to collaborate. I find that hard to stomach when it continues to hold that removal of the triple lock does not compromise our neutrality, but nonetheless and on that basis, what of the uniting for peace resolution and the use of the General Assembly, the Government's pursuit of which I have asked for proof of time and again? The Taoiseach was at the UN General Assembly recently. Did he raise this? Did he talk about how we would like the General Assembly to satisfy our triple lock as outlined in the Defence (Amendment) Act 2006? I do not think he did.

An Ceann Comhairle: That was rhetorical, just in case anyone was going to answer.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: Yes. Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: That is in the legislation.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister of State will be closing the debate and will be able to answer.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It is covered.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: The General Assembly is increasingly being seen as a crucial mechanism to get past what we all know to be issues with the veto by the permanent members of the Security Council, but beyond that the Defence (Amendment) Act 2006 clearly states:

> "International United Nations Force" means an international force or body established, mandated, authorised, endorsed, supported, approved or otherwise sanctioned by a resolution of the Security Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations;

Thus, even beyond the uniting for peace resolution that is available to the Government to satisfy the triple lock but that the Government has failed to pursue, a mission does not even have to be a Security Council mandate or a mission set up via the General Assembly, just

endorsed or supported. It is extremely generous language that allows for flexibility in the face of any Security Council deadlock, which we all acknowledge is an issue. In that context, the Government's histrionics over the permanent five members and the veto do not stand up to scrutiny. No new mandate was sought for Operation IRINI and, crucially, it is not a peacekeeping mission. The Minister spoke about four members of the Defence Forces having to withdraw immediately but that is false. They were not legally compelled to withdraw immediately because that was well under the existing limit of 12 deployed without the UN mandate,-----

Deputy Helen McEntee: No.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: No, that is the point I made.

Deputy Helen McEntee: It has nothing to do with numbers.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: -----which is what the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, then confirmed in his contribution.

An Ceann Comhairle: Sorry, Deputy. Just to prevent all the interruptions-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I made the point-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Hold on, please.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: -----that the figure of 12 related to Dáil approval.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister of State will have a closing statement. That is when he will address these matters. Take note.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Okay. I am only trying to help the debate.

An Ceann Comhairle: Do not interrupt the Deputy again. I have asked the Minister of State three times. Continue, Deputy.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle.

Finally, in terms of picking up on points that the Minister and Minister of State have put forward, the Minister of State said that the new definition still allowed us to participate in new UN missions and to take part in missions from the "OSCE, the EU or other regional arrangements". We can already do that. We already have. We just require a UN mandate because that is the guarantee given to the people in the Seville declarations. The invention of the Common Security and Defence Policy, Partnership for Peace and other EU mechanisms poses a threat to Irish neutrality. They run the risk of us not acting for human rights, not acting for the greater good and not acting for multilateralism and international law but for European interests. This is a bloc that has been consistently out of step with Irish foreign policy on the

genocide in Gaza, our commitments to humanitarian aid and human rights. Nobody is raising an issue with the Government's changes on civilian evacuation operations, so those points are misleading.

I will finish with a couple of quotes from the pre-legislative scrutiny when we had both Professor Ray Murphy and Mr. Joe Noonan in speaking to us. I will read what Professor Murphy said because they were such powerful words. He said:

> We are removing the requirement for the UN to approve and give legitimacy to Ireland's participation in an international force abroad. By doing so, we are joining all of those states that we are critical of, and that are rendering the United Nations dysfunctional ...

He also said:

> Allowing Irish forces to go to non-UN-approved forces is opening a *carte blanche* for major operations of a nature which we cannot predict. If we send forces on the ground, as part of an EU or NATO force ... [will] we become embroiled in an actual armed conflict and be a party to a conflict?

Those are powerful statements in the context of this debate. They tell us that we are threatening Irish neutrality. That is what is happening here no matter what the Government says or how much it denies that the Bill is a threat to our neutrality. That is exactly what it is. It is an abolition of Irish neutrality through the abolition of the triple lock.

As others have, I reiterate the Social Democrats' support for Óglaigh na hÉireann and recognition of the unbroken record of peacekeeping we are proud to hold as a nation state. We, as other parties do, support the mid-level funding that would see our Defence Forces brought back up to a level of functionality from where it is now that the Minister and Minister of State's Governments have allowed it to deteriorate to. This is vital legislation and it vital for us to debate it properly. We also object to the guillotine that is being applied today. I urge Government TDs to tune in and listen to their consciences because if they hold Irish neutrality dear, they must see through the spin of this Cabinet. What is being put forward is completely disingenuous. That this can be passed and we can maintain our neutral status as a nation state is nonsensical and we have to see through that.

Deputy Rory Hearne: The Minister of State's interrupting of my colleague was really out of line but it suggests that he knows this is a complete betrayal of the people's desire for Ireland to remain a neutral country. Even more than that, this is Fianna Fáil betraying its promises and going back on them. Fine Gael has always been very interested in pulling us into deeper militarisation and military links but for Fianna Fáil, this is deeply politically damaging and the Minister of State knows it. That is why he is squirming and intervening and why the Taoiseach was so riled by it.

I have rarely seen such a U-turn. Fianna Fáil was so explicit. The Taoiseach said in 2013 that the triple lock was core to our neutrality. The Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, said that, so what has changed? How is it now no longer the case? If we come forward to 2020, Fianna Fáil's manifesto sets it out so clearly. Fianna Fáil reaffirmed its commitment to the retention of the triple lock of the UN mandate authorisation and Government and Dáil approval prior to committing Defence Forces personnel on overseas service. Fianna Fáil's 2020 manifesto said it, so what has changed? How is Fianna Fáil now somehow claiming that getting rid of the

triple lock has no impact on our neutrality? Of course it does. It absolutely does. This is abandoning our neutrality.

What is really sad about this legislation and what the Government is doing is that not only is it abandoning our neutrality, it is abandoning the UN. It is giving up on the United Nations and the decades of work done to build it up as something that could try to get international peace. The Government is undermining Ireland's role as a global neutral force and peacekeeper by abandoning the UN. It knows that there are potential pathways to use the UN, like the General Assembly, as has been set out by my colleague, but it is giving up on those. That is deeply disappointing because it sends out the message that Ireland, just like so many others such as the US, no longer believes that the UN is reformable and can be a core institution globally. The US, Russia, Israel - all the aggressors are delighted with that. Ireland, one of the countries that stood up as a neutral country behind the UN, no matter what, is now saying that the UN no longer works as an international institution of peace. That is a very sad day. It is a much more profound implication of this legislation than has been considered and is being put across.

I want to echo the point that this is anti-democratic. The Government did not get approval for this in its manifestos, programme for Government or the general election and the matter should be put to the people. It is very clear that there is overwhelming support for our neutrality in its current form among the Irish people. Tá tacaíocht ollmhór i measc mhuintir na hÉireann dár neodracht mar atá sí faoi láthair. Tá sé sin thar a bheith soiléir. It is a very sad day for our neutrality and Ireland's role, which is being lost as a global peacemaker.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: I usually keep my contributions in this House to health issues and focus my work on health policy, but I asked for time on this debate because I felt strongly that this was the wrong decision. I think it is a decision that the Government and the Irish people are going to regret. I urge the Government to reconsider it, to take this slower and to not rush it through the House because it has profound changes for our nation, our sense of who we are and our place in the world.

There are members of the Minister's party - Fine Gael Members of this Parliament - who openly talk about wanting to join NATO. If we are honest about it, that is the direction of travel in which Fine Gael wants to take us. Meanwhile, Fianna Fáil is just happy to be in power. The fact that the Fianna Fáil Ministers of State are squirming beside the Minister tell us exactly how uncomfortable they are.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am the biggest advocate for this.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: But they are going along with Fine Gael on this. Eroding our neutrality erodes our soft power and influence in the world. We have a place in the world where we can focus on peacebuilding and peacekeeping. That is crucial. That is the role the Irish people want us to have on the world stage. We have a huge influence in the world because of our neutrality and our track record around peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

When international law is under attack, we need to defend the UN. We need to lean into multilateralism. We need to be that voice in the world saying that there is a different way. When there is a rise in militarism, we can say that neutrality and de-escalation are a way

forward. Fundamentally, I think that the Irish people agree with the Opposition on this and that, if we put this to the people, we would get a very clear result. The overwhelming majority of Irish people support neutrality and the triple lock. I urge the Minister to please reconsider this, take this slower and stop rushing this through the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: This is the wrong decision.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Niall Collins): I am glad to have the opportunity to speak about this legislation. I have been following the debate on this closely for a number of months. Some facts have been getting lost in the debate that I am glad to put on the record. The Fianna Fáil Party manifesto for the general election promised to reform the triple lock. The election saw Fianna Fáil - my party - returned as the largest party to Dáil Éireann with the highest vote share. The subsequent programme for Government, agreed with Fine Gael and the group of Independents, reaffirmed the pledge to reform the triple lock.

Deputy Paul Murphy: So why does the Government not reform it?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should please not interrupt.

Deputy Niall Collins: Thankfully, we do not do government by referendum in this country. We have seen how that has worked out for others - not so well. This is a democratically elected Government following through on a commitment, a commitment we made because we needed this reform. The need for this reform is clear because, while we have a proud history of peacekeeping in this country, the United Nations Security Council is dysfunctional. It has not approved any new peacekeeping missions since 2014. We are seeing very real implications of this dysfunction. At the end of this year, we are going to be forced to withdraw from Lebanon after almost 50 years. We are losing a real presence, history and a voice for Ireland in Lebanon against our own foreign policy objectives due to dysfunction outside of our control. There have been suggestions that we can reform the UN Security Council from within. That is wishful thinking. The possibility of that reform is remote. The main participants in the UN Security Council are determined to damage the operation of the United Nations to the greatest possible extent in respect of international law.

It is also regrettable that much of the debate has been hijacked by blatant misinformation and populism.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Niall Collins: Ireland is neutral. We cherish that neutrality and will continue to do so. This legislative reform has no effect on that. It is a simple fact that military neutrality is defined by non-participation in military alliances, common or mutual defence arrangements or active armed conflicts between other nations. Therefore, our military neutrality is not changing as a result of this legislative reform. The democratically elected Dáil will have the final

approval of any future measures, rather than any rogue superpower. How is that not sensible reform? Do Deputies not trust themselves?

Deputy Paul Murphy: We do not trust the Government.

Deputy Niall Collins: It is necessary and sensible reform. We live in a different world now from the one we lived in until recently. In these changed circumstances, to say that Ireland cannot do internationally what it used to be able to do because one of five nuclear powers says "No" does not make sense any more.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Minister of State.

Deputy Niall Collins: I am glad that the Government is following through on this commitment.

Deputy Catherine Callaghan: Speaking as the only current Member of this House who has served in the Permanent Defence Force and as a UN peacekeeper, I want to address some of the claims that have been made about this legislation. Sinn Féin's continual mislabelling of legislation calling the triple lock a neutrality protection mechanism is disingenuous. In listening to some of the other Opposition contributions, one would think that Ireland was completely abandoning its neutrality and we were turning our back on the United Nations or preparing to join NATO. None of these things is happening. Our military neutrality remains. Our full commitment to the United Nations remains, and our obligations under international law and the principles of the UN Charter remain.

The question at the heart of this debate is very simple: should Ireland decide where our Irish peacekeeping troops are deployed or should that decision remain dependent on the five permanent members of the UN Security Council? I believe that Ireland should decide. I have worn the Irish flag on my shoulder, and I understand what it means to represent this country. I also understand the professionalism of the Defence Forces and the importance of military advice in decisions about overseas deployments.

5 o'clock

However, what has changed is the world around us. The UN Security Council has not established a new peacekeeping mission since 2014, yet nobody in this House could suggest that the world has become a safer place in those intervening 12 years. Our commitment to the UN is unwavering but we must also recognise that the Security Council, in its current form, is increasingly paralysed by the veto powers of the permanent five. Reforming the triple lock does not mean abandoning neutrality. Military neutrality and the triple lock are not the same thing. Our neutrality is a long-standing policy of the State. The triple lock is a legal mechanism. We can reform that mechanism without changing our neutrality and, importantly, removing the UN Security Council requirement does not remove democratic accountability. Professional military advice remains central. Government approval remains and Dáil oversight remains. Future deployments will continue to be governed by international law, the principles of the UN Charter, our neutrality policy and Irish democratic safeguards.

I also welcome the provision arising from the Ward report. Having served, I know that discipline is fundamental to military life. I welcome the provisions that are strengthening suspension powers and reporting obligations where personnel face criminal charges.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am afraid the Deputy's time is up. I call Deputy O'Connell.

Deputy Maeve O'Connell: Reforming the triple lock is the right thing to do for the men and women of the Irish Defence Forces, Irish security, Irish sovereignty and Irish neutrality. I am disappointed by the Opposition's continued false framing of this debate. This legislation very simply proposes to remove the ability of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to prevent the Irish Government and the Dáil from deciding where and when to send our peacekeepers. To put it another way, the Opposition wants the UN Security Council to retain the power to stop us sending our peacekeepers overseas.

Let us be fair to the UN Security Council members. In deciding whether to bring a vote to the UN Security Council, the impact in Ireland is not top of their considerations or, most likely, even a consideration at all. The impact on Ireland is of no importance to them but, obviously, it is of huge consequence to us. There have been no new peacekeeping or peace important missions approved by the UN Security Council since 2014. That is 12 years. In those 12 years, other countries - other neutral countries - have participated in new missions but Ireland could not. Now, as we know, the UN Security Council mandate for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, UNIFIL, in Lebanon is coming to an end. Three generations of Irish peacekeepers have proudly served in Lebanon and the Opposition seems to be happy that there will not be a fourth. Perhaps members of the Opposition does not really want Ireland to work for peace at all. Perhaps they just prefer talking about it but are not really interested in doing the hard work to secure peace. I have a couple of questions for the Opposition. How does the requirement for a UN Security Council mandate, which would include the approval of the US before we can consider sending our peacekeepers overseas, actually protect our neutrality? That is the same US whose President recently visited this island, which many members of the Opposition objected to, yet at the same time, they are okay with that President's Administration getting to decide if we can send our peacekeepers overseas. How does the requirement for the approval of Russia protect our neutrality? The Opposition is happy to allow the country that illegally invaded Ukraine four years ago, bringing war to Europe and death, disruption and hardship to Ukraine, to have a voice on where we, a neutral country, can send our peacekeepers? How does the requirement for the approval of the UK protect our neutrality? Sinn Féin rejects in principle the authority of the UK over Northern Ireland, yet it is happy for the UK to decide where the Irish men and women of our Defence Forces can serve overseas. This does not make any sense to me.

Why does the Opposition not trust the public on this? We are fortunate to live in a parliamentary democracy, which is not what some of the members of the UN Security Council permanent five are. The public elected us to this Chamber, which decides where we send our peacekeepers, and these are the other parts of the triple lock we should be talking about.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Then why did Fine Gael not put it in its manifesto?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Put it in the manifesto.

Deputy Maeve O'Connell: The Government and the Dáil have to approve where we deploy our peacekeepers.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy. I am afraid her time is up. I call Deputy Devlin.

Deputy Murphy, I am not going to ask you again.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I welcome the debate today. I want to thank everyone who has been in touch with me with feedback. Their concerns about the triple lock are heartfelt and come from a genuine pride in our peacekeepers and a deep attachment to neutrality. I welcome the feedback and constructive debate here today. Nothing in this Bill, though, changes Ireland's traditional position of military neutrality. Ireland is not joining a military alliance, there are no plans to change that by this Government and any change would require a referendum.

This Bill relates to UN peacekeeping. Irish troops have served in UN missions since 1958. Our Defence Forces have distinguished themselves on more than 76,000 individual tours of duty; and 48 Irish soldiers have given their lives for peace in Lebanon alone.

Frank Aiken did much to shape that tradition. As Minister for External Affairs, he gave Ireland an independent voice at the United Nations. In 1960, as our troops left for the Congo, the Dáil first legislated for UN service. At that time, Seán Lemass told this House that the UN Charter obliges every member to give the UN every assistance but he also warned that the Security Council had only too often in the past been hamstrung by the exercise of the veto. The world has changed radically since 1960. Today, the veto has deadlocked the Security Council. It has not set up any new UN peacekeeping missions since 2014. These challenges were debated ahead of the last general election and in the Fianna Fáil manifesto, it promised reform. The programme for Government, approved by this very House, committed to reform and action. Ireland is an independent State. Our right to set our own foreign economic policy was hard won and developed step by step from the 1930s under the leadership of de Valera, Aiken and Lemass.

Clearly, we must be realistic about the international order but the decision on where our peacekeepers serve must be made here in this House by the elected representatives of Dáil Éireann, not by others in far-flung capitals representing their own interests. As the Labour Party's William Norton TD said in the House in 1960, "this Parliament is the custodian of the interests of the nation" and I agree with him. No state should have a veto over Irish or economic policy.

Under this Bill, every deployment needs a Government decision, it must be consistent with the UN Charter, and any contingent of more than 50 personnel needs the approval of this House. This brings Ireland in line with our European partners, including neutral Austria, and it is entirely within our rights as a sovereign member of the United Nations. This Bill facilitates our proud tradition of UN peacekeeping and I will be supporting it.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: What has changed? In Fianna Fáil's 2020 general election manifesto, it stated that if in government, it wanted to fully maintain neutrality and the triple lock. Sinn Féin believes that Ireland's neutrality is a strength that is supported by the Irish people but Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in government are trying to change the role of Irish troops from peacemakers to conflict participants. No Irish parent wants to see their child in a conflict role or being deployed into European militarisation. The Irish people want to see more defence combined with neutrality.

An Taoiseach made a solemn declaration to the Irish people prior to the second Nice and Lisbon referendums. These solemn declarations were intended to ease the fear of the Irish public regarding European militarisation and they did this through a promise to the Irish people. Those promises were to protect the triple lock. In 2013, an Taoiseach told this House that the triple lock was the core of Irish neutrality. Has Micheál Martin now rejected this statement as today he says the exact opposite? He maintained that he is now removing the triple lock so that we can continue to take part in peacekeeping missions.

I accept issues exist with the Security Council authorisation and recognise and commend the position of the Government regarding the necessary reform. Circumstances have changed, yes, but an Taoiseach's statements and promises to the Irish people were resolute and absolute. An Taoiseach likes to speak to his brand of politics of being of substance.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: If so, put a referendum to the people-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is using up Deputy Mac Lochlainn's time.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: -----and stop the bullying tactics to make the decisions for the people of Ireland. Let the Irish people have their say and protect our neutrality.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Mac Lochlainn is next to speak. He might stand, please.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Let us just get to the nub of the issue. Members of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil know that neutrality is cherished by our people - this proud legacy we inherited. Deputy Devlin talked about Frank Aiken and I completely agree. It is a proud legacy. That policy of neutrality was not to sit idly by. That was to allow us to have peacekeepers. It was to allow us to be in the defence of human rights internationally and be involved in peace and conflict resolution internationally.

We had the credibility and independence to do all of that. That is the reason, after the rejection of the first Lisbon treaty by the Irish people, the then Government, led by Fianna Fáil, made the solemn declaration that has evolved into the triple lock. There was a solemn declaration and an assurance offered to the Irish people in order to get them to vote for the Lisbon proposition the second time around. The Government knows this. What we are saying is that in order to honour that solemn declaration, the Irish people have to have their say in this matter. It could not be simpler. It is not about Sinn Féin, the Social Democrats, the Labour Party, People Before Profit, Aontú or Independent Ireland, or about a range of Opposition

parties; it is about the Irish people. The Minister knows this, and any attempt to walk away from that is deeply shameful and dishonest. It is as simple as that. This is a cherished principle for the Irish people. It has been a strength for us internationally. The Minister cannot undo it without putting it to the Irish people. It is as simple as that.

Deputy Duncan Smith: I noted that, in her opening statement, the Minister framed this debate quite narrowly, as she has done in previous statements on the issue and during Private Members' business. She framed it largely in terms of the UN Security Council being an impediment that simply needs to be removed to allow for more agile and sophisticated foreign policy decisions, implying that anyone who thinks otherwise is prehistoric and unsophisticated in their thinking. The Minister does this in a hurried and rushed fashion. There are two things at play here. One, I believe the Minister knows she does not have the support of the Irish people here and that she is unsure of her own policy on this. She knows she did not get a mandate for this from the voters, nor is it in the programme for Government. What is in the programme for Government is a reform of the triple lock. What most of us in opposition have been proposing through pre-legislative scrutiny and through debate has been a reform of the triple lock because the UN Security Council is broken. I am not advocating for it to return to its former glories. The power of the nuclear five to exercise a veto is a Cold War construct and it is undemocratic. The Cold War ended a long time ago and we need a new way, or more accurately, not necessarily a new way but a different instrument to achieve our triple lock objectives. We can do that through a Uniting for Peace resolution and a motion of assent in the General Assembly. We know it is not a binding motion, but we know it would at least maintain an important lock in the triple lock.

I do not believe the triple lock is the full manifestation or expression of Irish neutrality. I believe it is part of it, and an important part of it at that. What the triple lock is and what it represents is our strong expression of and commitment to the UN and the goals of a global effort towards peace. The triple lock, as it has existed over the last quarter of a century or so, has codified our link to the primary multilateral institution in the world, the UN, in terms of peacekeeping and personnel deployment. We have been proud of this. It has been a good thing.

The Government has flipped on this in the last number of months and has presented it as a bad thing, saying we are the only ones who do this and that we must surely be mad. The question we should be asking is why others are not doing this. Why are others not strengthening their links with the UN and codifying their links with it in relation to the promotion and securing of peace? We are actually doing something right, not wrong, and we should be promoting that with our European partners and beyond because the UN Security Council is broken.

When the Cold War ended, and the end of history was falsely declared, there was brief hope in the 1990s of a more peaceful world order, but that has been shattered in this millennium with the events of 11 September 2001, Afghanistan, Iraq, terrorism, AI weaponry, drone warfare, grey-zone attacks, asymmetric threats and, of course, genocide. All the alliances have been obliterated and the countries of the world are grasping for new certainties. Within this, Ireland, no longer a small nation, but a middle power, is struggling to find its place. We are in danger of making the wrong choices. With this Bill, we are making a wrong choice, a choice that is

opening us up to risk: risk to our own security, risk to our troops, and risk to our reputation and our culture of being a powerful voice for peace in the world.

Ireland is a member of two multilateral institutions, the EU and the UN. I will return to the EU. The UN is at its weakest in its history because it is under attack by the great hegemonic Cold War powers. The UN Security Council is paralysed and, yes, it has not agreed a new peacekeeping mission since 2014 in the Central African Republic. What is more, the UN Security Council is allowing peacekeeping missions to lapse, most pertinently for Ireland, the UNIFIL mission in Lebanon, which will come to an end later this year. Operation Irini, which has been placed front and centre by the Minister in her arguments as to why the triple lock must be removed rather than reformed, is something we believe could have been retained if she had followed what we in the Opposition are proposing in terms of reform rather than throwing the entire triple lock out.

One important question needs to be asked honestly of all of us in this House. Do we support the deployment of Irish troops as part of UN missions such as UNIFIL? Perhaps not all in this House do, but we in the Labour Party do, and we do so without equivocation. In fact, we believe missions are enhanced by the presence of Óglaigh na hÉireann, which brings not only experience and expertise to peacekeeping missions but also a culture of non-offensive warfare, a culture of peacemaking and a culture that can be hard to quantify but impossible to deny.

I want to see Ireland continue to be able to provide this in a shifting world, and that is going to give rise to difficult questions, questions I have been asking myself and that we have been discussing in the Labour Party for many months. The answer to those questions ultimately comes back, we believe, to the UN. As Deputy Gibney stated, the UN is the only show in town when it comes to peacekeeping, and we cannot turn our back on it. The UN may fail when the great powers damage it, but it will definitely fail when the middle and smaller nations walk away. That is what we are in danger of doing. I do not believe Ireland can reform the UN on its own, and I am not going to, in bad faith, pretend we have answers or say UN reform is the answer, because I have not heard anyone express a true pathway for UN reform that is actually going to work. It is going to be complex and will have to be done within the UN over many years. However, we do not need UN reform to continue to use the triple lock effectively. We can do it through the Uniting for Peace mechanism and through motions of assent in the General Assembly.

Why has the Government shifted from its own election manifestos and its own programme for Government? I would relish a debate on the triple lock in terms of reform. It would be very interesting, but we are not having that. We are having a debate about the triple lock's removal. Where is the pressure coming from? It is not coming from the Irish people because they support it. They support the UN. This is deep within their marrow. The pressure is coming from Europe.

I am not someone who is mistrustful of Europe or conspiratorial about it, but the facts are the facts. Europe and the European neighbourhood are now at the forefront of traditional warfare owing to Russia's attack on Ukraine, grey-zone attacks in relation to the Baltic states and other threats, including threats in the North Atlantic. European member states are on a pathway and a programme for rearmament and remilitarisation. Again, this is not a conspiratorial assertion; this is a fact.

Poland will have one of the largest armies in the world. It is spending 5% of its GDP on arms. It will have a 300,000-strong standing army and 200,000 reserves, amounting to half a million. It is doing that because it feels a threat from Russia. It is a member state of the EU. We had ambassadors from the Baltic states, including Finland, in committee last week speaking about the threats they are under, and they are arming at a rate too. These are members of the EU. This is the international institution of which we are a part, and this is the international institution that will be progressing EU-led peacekeeping, peace enforcement and security missions in the future.

The first one will not be a replacement for UNIFIL, but it is what is coming next. It will not be in southern Lebanon; it will be in central Lebanon, and its mission will be to train the Lebanese army against Hezbollah. It may have a knock-on impact with regard to Israel but it will not be on the southern border. It is what comes next. What will come after that? Will it be Ukraine, Poland, the Baltics, Türkiye, the Mediterranean or the north Atlantic? These are the questions we will answer. The EU is evolving rapidly with regard to a common defence union. We had Professor John O'Brennan in the foreign affairs committee. Granted, he was not talking about the triple lock. He was talking about the European Union's evolution. He is saying that the EU is living in an uncomfortable world, which I do not think any of us can deny, and the hegemonic ambitions of the United States, China and Russia, versus the weakening of multilateralism and the trend away from soft power, such as trade, for which the EU was founded, to hard power, which is not a natural competence of the EU, will accelerate the creation of a European defence union. His view, which I share, is that it probably will not be a coercive union and members probably will not be compelled to join but it will ask significant questions of EU member states individually and collectively.

By untethering us from the United Nations and from having that guardrail, this Bill means that we are operating within the milieu of an EU that is evolving rapidly and will be faced with tough security and defence questions. Bear in mind, this Government has not produced a national security strategy that it said it would. It was in its programme for Government under reform of the triple lock, by the way, but it has not been published yet. We have to go on trust if we are to support this Bill, which we will not be supporting. It is hard to trust a Government on this issue when it is not being open and honest about the true nature of why this is being removed.

Some of the security interests in Europe will match Irish interests. I want to see the north Atlantic secured. We have issues with our undersea cables and so on, and all of this is related. However, the European Union can change. The UK is not in it any more. Spain could have a change of government. Germany is currently being run by a centre-right or a right-wing government, if you ask me. That could move to AfD. France could be ruled by Le Pen. These are not fantastical ideas. They are things that could definitely happen. What does the EU look like in a security, defence and peace enforcement scenario when its two biggest powers are being run by the far right? These are genuine questions and concerns that cannot be dismissed.

Keeping the triple lock does not remove them or answer them and I am not saying it does. The Labour Party believes that it brings these decisions to another forum. It is the most global forum, which we have trusted for decades, the United Nations. It is a forum that the Government parties, as well as almost all of us in opposition, have been proud of for many years. In fact, those in Fianna Fáil are tying themselves in knots to say how proud they are of

their links to the United Nations, Frank Aiken and so on for many years. That is the one truth of this Bill. In this area, this Government is removing us and untethering us.

We can do much of what we need for peacekeeping by going through the UN General Assembly and getting motions of assent. It is unwieldy but international diplomacy is unwieldy. The UN is unwieldy and imperfect. We talk about being agile. In our manifestos, we and others in opposition said that we would increase the number of troops for rapid deployment to extract citizens and so on. That is not a problem. We agree with all that. When it comes to the deployment of troops in a multilateral force, we have to have the UN involved. If we turn our backs on the UN, we are turning our backs on the only hope of a multilateral institution that can help bring about peace in the world that exists now. That might sound highfalutin but it is the only thing we have. I do not think the EU is there yet. The EU is fighting a number of battles with other hegemonic powers. It wants to be at the table. It wants to be like China, like America and like Russia. It wants to have that power.

Tricky times are ahead. We do not have the depth of discussion and policy required. I do not think we have the robustness and honesty in government to be able to enter that world at this time, because we have not had the discussions. This Government, whether through this Second Stage debate or through truncating pre-legislative scrutiny, has not allowed enough discussion. I know what it will do when this gets to Committee Stage. It will shorten that too and try to rush this through before Christmas. I am frustrated by others with regard to how neutrality is discussed. I do not think it is discussed well in this Chamber. It is far more complex than is indicated in this Chamber and in others. We need to have proper discussions about defence and security.

It is true and certain that with this Bill, this Government is throwing huge risk and uncertainty over the deployment of our troops and our foreign, defence and security policies. It is doing this under pressure from Europe, which is understandable pressure, because some European states are under huge threat, which I understand. We do not need to, and we should not, remove the triple lock. We should look at strengthening the UN with our voice and our deeds. This Government will look back on this as a real regret, because it will be the moment that it turned its back, in a security framework, on the United Nations. It should not do it. Much of the Opposition will work with the Government through Committee Stage to pull back from this. We have a few weeks to do it and I ask the Government to do it. This is the wrong move.

Deputy Emer Currie: Ireland has a proud tradition of peacekeeping. For 60 years, Irish men and women have served overseas, protecting civilians, monitoring ceasefires and making communities safe. This legislation is about ensuring that contribution can continue. It does not alter Ireland's policy of neutrality. It does not commit us to membership of a military alliance or oblige us to participate in any particular overseas operation. It reforms the mechanism through which we decide where our personnel can serve.

The triple lock currently requires Government approval, Dáil approval and a United Nations mandate for deployments overseas. That mechanism is no longer working as it should. It leaves us vulnerable to decisions by countries whose interests and priorities may be very different from our own. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council, through the use or threat of a veto, can block Ireland's participation in peacekeeping missions, irrespective

of the wishes of the Irish Government or Dáil Éireann. We have already seen the practical consequences of the existing arrangements.

In May, Irish personnel had to cease their participation in Operation Irini in the Mediterranean after the relevant Security Council authorisation expired. I listened to former Deputy Cathal Berry, a former Army Ranger, on the radio this morning as he explained that the Kremlin refused to extend the UN mandate. About 20 other countries stayed in the Mediterranean while Ireland was the only participating country to withdraw. With UNIFIL's operational mandate scheduled to end this December, we are also seeing this issue emerge in Lebanon. These are not hypothetical concerns. They are real limitations with real consequences for our Defence Forces and our international engagement. Without reform, our options will narrow and our ability to sustain the peacekeeping contribution we have made for more than six decades will be constrained.

I respect the concerns people have raised. Sending Irish personnel overseas is a serious responsibility. It deserves careful scrutiny, clear legal safeguards and democratic accountability. Government approval and Dáil scrutiny remain central to the proposed arrangements. Missions must be consistent with the UN Charter and international law. Removing the requirement for a UN mandate does not remove our responsibility to uphold those principles. That responsibility must guide every decision we make.

Our tradition of neutrality has helped make Ireland a distinctive and valued contributor to international peacekeeping, and we should protect that tradition. However, since when did the independence of a sovereign nation depend on securing the permission of the world's most powerful states? I believe that those who oppose this reform must address the consequences of leaving the existing arrangements unchanged. How do they propose to sustain Ireland's peacekeeping contribution when mandates expire?

Deputy Malcolm Byrne: This is an important debate. Any decision that we make with regard to defence, security or foreign policy must be in line with our values, which are consistency with international law and respect for human rights, for the rule of law and for democracy.

This country has always been very committed to multilateralism. The parties on this side have always been strong supporters of the United Nations, and only the parties on this side have been strong supporters of the European Union since Ireland joined it. When questions about multilateralism come up, it needs to be remembered that it was the leader of Sinn Féin who shared a platform with Nigel Farage during one of the referendums and one of the parties opposite supported Brexit. When it comes to multilateralism and the role of Ireland, it is a bit rich for some in the Opposition to start citing previous referendum commitments.

For the purpose of this debate, I chose to go back into the history and read the debates in July 1946 when it came to Ireland joining the United Nations, and then the debates around the adoption of the Defence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1960, which led to the first time we committed troops to the Congo. I will quote Éamon de Valera from 1946 when, during the post-war period, he spoke about Ireland joining the UN. He said:

> Some people think that all that is necessary in order to keep out of war is to declare that one is neutral. That is not sufficient. I would like our people and the members of this House to

bear in mind that for six years of war the question as to whether our neutrality would be respected or not depended ultimately upon the will of, perhaps, two men.

De Valera warned about the danger of the State being too reliant on the decisions of foreign powers. He certainly would not have been happy with the idea of the UK continuing to hold a veto over Irish foreign policy or decisions on peacekeeping troops.

In 1960, when the issue was Congo, we were at the height of the Cold War. The big debate then was about whether the UN would just decide to order our troops in. Seán Lemass, the then Taoiseach, pointed out the Bill then provided "that, except in certain clearly defined cases, the exercise of this power will be subject to the approval of Dáil Éireann in each instance." His emphasis was on the decision having to be taken by the Dáil, referencing the Constitution. This is about our peacekeeping. As others have said, this is not going to be an easy decision in any circumstance. The decisions have to be in line with the values we set out. We should listen to our peacekeepers on this issue.

Deputy James Geoghegan: This is a very serious and significant debate. Perhaps the most serious debate that any nation state can have is where it sends its defence forces and what are the circumstances under which it sends its defence forces abroad. It is, of course, incredibly important in this country because we are so proud of our neutrality, the strength of our neutrality and what our neutrality does for this country. We are also really proud of our peacekeeping forces. I have heard many Opposition Members telling us what the Irish public think. I believe the Irish public are incredibly proud of the men and women who are currently serving abroad and those who have served abroad in the past.

There are two fundamental lies that have underpinned the Opposition debate in respect of the issues that pertain to this Bill. The first is that this Bill represents some form of attack on multilateralism and the United Nations. The second lie is that this somehow represents a transition from Ireland being peacemakers to being conflict makers, as I heard one Sinn Féin TD say, and forming part of conflict. It is very difficult. I think Deputy Farrell is giving out to me for using the word "lie".

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Is he allowed to say "lie"?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It was a lie.

An Ceann Comhairle: Keep going, Deputy Geoghegan.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I will say "untruth" if that solves the issue.

Deputy Thomas Gould: You said it now.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am chairing the meeting.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Just to let the Chair know, I will be coming back on those comments.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gould can watch the debate from his office.

Deputy Thomas Gould: No, I am watching here. I will not be accused of being a liar by anyone. If Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael want to go down that road, I will go down it with them.

An Ceann Comhairle: Your name was not mentioned. I ask Deputy Geoghegan to continue. Do not interrupt again, Deputy Gould.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I do not think Sinn Féin has any credibility with the public when it comes to telling people where the Defence Forces are going to enter conflict or where any Irish man or woman is going to enter conflict versus the defence of peace. For decades in this country, Sinn Féin and its predecessors sent men and women into conflict when others were looking for peace, so it has no credibility. Leaving aside the fact that Sinn Féin has no credibility, its claims are simply not true.

To the first point, the idea that Ireland is somehow undermining the United Nations because the United Nations Security Council is preventing peace missions from taking place is frankly ridiculous.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Which missions? Name them.

Deputy James Geoghegan: A point Deputy Gibney completely ignored in her submission is that the legislation makes it very clear that peacekeeping missions that are sanctioned, not just by the United Nations Security Council but by the General Assembly, can and would be carried out by the Defence Forces in Ireland with the approval of Dáil Éireann. There is nothing in this Bill that is in any shape or form undermining multilateralism. It is quite the opposite.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I tend to try to approach the problems we face in this Chamber from a pragmatic perspective but they have to be based on core principles. Let me, therefore, outline in clear terms what I believe on this. First, I believe fundamentally in Ireland's military neutrality and do not believe in us being part of military alliances. Second, I believe in our tradition of peacekeeping and I want to see that continue. Third, I believe in the sovereignty of Ireland and this Parliament to make decisions with regard to Ireland. If we take those three core principles and apply them to the problem we will have from next January, when hundreds of Irish peacekeepers for the first time in many decades will be left in Ireland rather than being out around the world providing peacekeeping solutions, how do we, as a Chamber, resolve that? Many in the Opposition might say they do not want to fix the problem and we should leave peacekeepers in Ireland until we can get a UN mandate in this decade or the next decade. Most Irish people believe what the Irish Defence Forces have done in Lebanon is important. In Lebanon in particular, the Defence Forces have kept the aggression of Israel in check in many parts, and I want Irish peacekeepers to stay there.

Deputy Paul Murphy: As part of an EU mission.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Let me say this without interruption. I believe in the sovereignty of Ireland. We fought for hundreds of years to make our own-----

Deputy Seamus Healy: There were two referendums.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Let me make the points without interruption.

Deputy Seamus Healy: There were two referendums.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Healy.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Two referendums decided the triple lock.

An Ceann Comhairle: Just one second. Deputy Healy is also free to watch the debate from his office. If he is going to remain in that seat, he must not interrupt another Deputy.

Deputy Seamus Healy: It is not true.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is a matter of respect here that each Deputy can contribute without interruption. Please respect the direction of the Chair.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Respect the rest of us.

An Ceann Comhairle: The direction of the Chair is that nobody should interrupt another Member. That is all I ask. Deputy McAuliffe may continue.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I thank the Ceann Comhairle. I said I believe in the sovereignty of the Irish people and of this Parliament, and I really do. I believe that, regardless of one's political view, the Government formed by this Chamber are the people responsible for governing Ireland. That is exactly what the Constitution says. External relations shall be exercised by the Government.

I cannot understand how parties that mistrust the British Government on so many issues are willing to give Britain a veto over where we send our troops and that mistrust the American Government on so many issues are willing to give Donald Trump a veto on us sending troops to Lebanon. Why do we not trust this place? The word "trust" was used by Deputies opposite. I will finish on this point. Ultimately, the Opposition does not trust this Government on lots of issues. We have political differences. I understand that. However, if the Deputies opposite were elected to govern in the morning, while they might make different decisions than we would, I would trust in-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy McAuliffe's time is up.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: -----their right and mandate from the Irish people to make those decisions, because I abide by the Constitution.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy McAuliffe.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I do not believe anybody outside this island should be dictating-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy McAuliffe, your time is up.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I was interrupted.

An Ceann Comhairle: You were, but I gave you latitude for the time you were interrupted.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: You gave me 20 seconds.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Farrell.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Ceann Comhairle, you continue to allow people to be browbeaten in this Chamber. I lost a minute of my three minutes while we have other speakers-----

An Ceann Comhairle: You did not lose a minute.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Take a minute back.

An Ceann Comhairle: Follow the direction of the Chair, Deputy.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: It is obvious that some Members of this House have no right to speak in this House.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Take an extra minute.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Earlier today, the Minister claimed that the Government has a mandate to remove the triple lock. To be honest, I find that to be an astonishing claim. Every single opinion poll repeatedly shows overwhelming public support for our neutrality and for retaining the triple lock. Even a majority of the Government parties' voters want to see it protected. The Government has never sought a mandate to weaken our neutrality. No members of this Government were elected on the promise to abolish the triple lock.

No member of this Government got elected on the promise to abolish the triple lock. There was no commitment in the manifestos of Fianna Fail or Fine Gael to do so. Let us be clear that the only mandate they have is to protect the triple lock. Irish neutrality is not theirs to change, and the triple lock is not theirs to dismantle. If the Government wants to make any changes to our neutrality, then it must go the people. It is their right and their right alone to decide the future of our neutrality.

The Minister said earlier today that all TDs will get to have their say on the legislation tonight. I urge all Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Deputies, as well as those Independent backbenchers propping up this Government, to act on the Minister’s words and have their say. I urge them to represent their constituents who overwhelmingly oppose this attack on our

neutrality. I urge them to vote to keep the triple lock and protect our neutrality. This is a question for the Irish people. It is a question that has been promised to the Irish people through referendums. They want this kept. It should not be the decision of a Minister, Taoiseach or Tánaiste to scrap this. The Irish people want it to stay. The Irish people are proud of our neutrality. The triple lock should stay. I will be watching closely as to how people vote tonight.

Deputy Thomas Gould: It is good to start with the Taoiseach's own words, namely that the triple lock is !at the core of Irish neutrality" and that UN peacekeeping is the core of Irish neutrality. That is what the Taoiseach said. My constituency colleague, Fianna Fáil TD, Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan, said on "The Tonight Show" last night that it is regrettable that more time was not given to the debate. This is one of the most major decisions that any of us will make as a TD, and it is probably one of the major decisions this Government will make. History will look back at our speeches. I listened to a Deputy talking about going back to look at speeches from the forties and other times. People will look at what we say tonight. This is history. What the Government is doing is fundamentally wrong. The Irish people voted twice, in the Nice and Lisbon referendums, and sent a clear message that they want to protect Irish neutrality. They do not want Europe to drag us into any conflicts.

I heard a Deputy talk a while ago about conflicts, although I cannot remember who it was. Does that Deputy remember that people in his party flew the swastika in Dublin and Galway when they sailed to Spain to attack the Spanish people, whereas Frank Ryan and his men went over there to stand up for the Spanish people?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: That is not true.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Let us remember that. If Members wish to talk about history, let us remember that. Was that the right decision to fly the swastika? By God, then they come into the Chamber, accuse the Opposition and say Sinn Féin are liars. They cannot stand over their argument. That Deputy never withdrew his statement. It is because they know the Irish people do not want this. They know they cannot go to the people. They know it will be rejected. Is there a man or a woman in here with a backbone to stand up for the people? I think not.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Seán Russell.

An Ceann Comhairle: Excuse me, Minister of State. Please do not have me say it again. I call Deputy Paul Murphy.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I have seen a lot of dishonest and disingenuous arguments and debates in the Dáil but this is the worst. The Government cannot possibly believe what it is saying. It knows what it is saying is not true. The Minister of State is fond of saying over and over again that we are reforming the triple lock but the reason for that is that is all he has a mandate for. Fine Gael has no mandate whatsoever on this. It did not mention it. I am sure the Independents did not mention it either. Fianna Fáil has a mandate to protect Irish military neutrality and to reform the triple lock. The Government is not telling the truth, nor is the Minister of State when he pretends that something is being reformed when, in fact, it is being scrapped. Will anyone refer to the triple lock if the Government has its way with this? It will

be gone, of course. No one will call it the triple lock anymore. If there are three locks and one is done away with, then it is not a triple lock anymore. It will, therefore, not be reformed. The Government's own civil servants accepted that.

We are also meant to accept the idea that this has nothing to do with neutrality. We are all meant to forget the discussions we had over the past years in which the Government very openly said it wanted to have a discussion about neutrality. Michéal Martin said that neutrality was simply a policy issue that can change at any time and called for a reflection on military non-alignment in Ireland and our military neutrality. Everyone with eyes to see knew what the Government was doing. The Government took advantage of the situation and fear created by Putin's invasion of Ukraine to try to scrap our neutrality. It ran into strong public opinion, and so simply devised a new tactic to redefine what neutrality is. Listening to the Minister's speeches, neutrality simply means not joining NATO now. That is all it means. We could send troops to Iraq-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: No, we could not.

Deputy Paul Murphy: We could send troops to Iraq and we would still be neutral because the Government has simply redefined neutrality as not joining a military alliance.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: That would be unconstitutional.

Deputy Paul Murphy: What is his definition then?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Article 29 of the-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Minister of State can provide his definition of neutrality in his reply.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister of State has a rebuttal.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Government has redefined neutrality as simply not being in a military alliance, and that is not for no reason.

Interestingly and very worryingly, in the senior Minister's speech today, on the one hand she told us that this is nothing to do with neutrality and that there is no threat to neutrality. On the other hand, however, she said, "Putting neutrality in our Constitution would undoubtedly prevent us from engaging in any meaningful way with other countries on security or defence matters". What? On the one hand, we are a neutral country and we should not worry about a threat to neutrality but, on the other hand, we cannot put it in our Constitution that governs what governments can do because that would prevent us engaging with others. Who will we be engaging with? Is it NATO? Would it be a problem to the Government's participation almost every single month in meetings in NATO headquarters? Would it be a problem with the agenda that anyone with eyes can see that Micheál Martin is absolutely rearing to have Ireland more and more integrated into a Western military alliance? Are we expected to forget that Michéal Martin signed up to facilitate the US invasion of Iraq? We are expected to forget all

of this and simply trust the Government. We do not trust it. We do not trust governments that have supported and facilitated US imperialist invasions over decades. Of course we do not trust the Government.

Finally, we have the red herring of the veto. It is a nonsense. There is no veto. The UN General Assembly can, currently, unlock the triple lock. That is in the legislation as it currently stands. All of this is framed with the idea about a country of sovereign choosing where it sends peacekeepers. It is not just the triple lock that stops us choosing where we send peacekeepers; there is also international law. International law and the UN Charter say that we cannot just send troops wherever we want. What the triple lock does is it enshrines international law into Irish law. The Government wants to get rid of it so that it can send troops to participate in illegal wars. The Government needs to tell us the illegal wars it wants us to participate in.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: This Bill represents an historic betrayal of this country's tradition of neutrality, instigated by people like Wolfe Tone and later by James Connolly, Pádraig Pearse and Constance Markievicz. The Government is betraying that tradition, and it has no right to do so because that tradition of neutrality is the property of the people of this country, not of any government. Let us be clear that, if this passes, there is nothing to stop the Irish Government sending Irish troops abroad in military adventures and wars involving, according to the new wording, any "regional arrangement or body that operates in a manner consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and international law". By whom is that defined?

Yesterday, I attended the funeral of Denis Halliday, a former UN Assistant Secretary General from this country and a fantastic activist. I stood on the platforms with him in 2003 when Fianna Fáil facilitated the US military to go through Shannon Airport to commit an illegal war against Iraq, which claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. US troops were allowed to go through Shannon Airport. Denis Halliday resigned from the United Nations because of the sanctions regime that claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. When those criminal sanctions were imposed, they were apparently in line with international law but, in fact, what was done to the Iraqi people was criminal and murderous. It was claimed to be done in the name of international law and in line with the Charter.

Anybody can claim them and indeed Donald Trump, if pushed, would probably claim his actions are in line with international law and the Charter of the United Nations. What the Government is actually doing is removing the block on the Irish Government being able to deploy troops in those situations. Would the Government send young people to die in wars in which they did not want to die?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: No.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is doing it right now. I was talking to Ukrainians who fled to this country because they do not want to fight for either Zelenskyy or Putin and they looked for refuge. If refuge is about anything, it is about providing refuge to people who do not want to fight in wars but the Irish Government is checking people's papers and if they do not have a pass on conscription they are being sent back to fight and die in a war they do not want to fight in. The Government is doing it to the Ukrainians who it claims to support and to

be concerned about. Would the Government do it to young Irish people too? Yes, it would, just like it lets the US military through Shannon to conduct a criminal war, invites President Trump, who is up to his neck in the genocide that Israel is committing, and will not impose sanctions on that regime because it is pals with Trump. That is the truth of it.

The UN is far from perfect. It is very far from perfect but the one thing the veto does is prevent us from being involved in military conflict where the big powers are at loggerheads with each other. That is the whole point and that goes right back to Wolfe Tone and Connolly and that we do not side with empires.

Deputy Brian Stanley: There needs to be a level of honesty about what is being put forward here. The Government is not being honest about what is happening here. It is doing away with multilateralism and having UN approval so that Ireland can participate in what the Bill refers to as other regional arrangements and relevant international forces. Who defines that?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It is in the legislation.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The fact is this Bill is not a small change or a modification to our defence and foreign policy and it is misleading spin to say otherwise. It is a complete change of our position as a State and how we deal with international relations and the UN. It is not reform of the triple lock; it is the abolition of it. It is yet another move, on top of what Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have been doing for the last 20 years or so, to undermine our position as a neutral State. This includes misinformation and arms industry propaganda pumped out, day after day, participation in joint NATO missions, and the scandalous use of Shannon Airport by the US war machine to carry out its illegal oil wars in the Middle East. I could go on and on.

This misinformation from Government Ministers and spokespersons has included such nonsense as the claim that we cannot deploy more than 12 troops for rescue missions and the like unless the UN Security Council approves it. Some of them were saying this until recently but of course we can do that, as confirmed by the Minister many times and as confirmed in the legislation. There is no limit on what can be deployed for missions related to rescue, natural disasters or for humanitarian purposes. Another example is the claim that we will not be able to participate in peacekeeping missions but there are 11 active peacekeeping missions already in the world. Another claim is that we need to modernise our Defence Forces. Of course we do and we should not be leaving it until now to do it. That needed to be resourced, our personnel needed to be paid properly and our Defence Forces needed to be modernised long ago. That should have happened and nothing in the triple lock stops us from doing that. Another suggestion is that Russia will use the power of veto that the five permanent members of the Security Council have to block resolutions on peacekeeping. Which ones? There was only one resolution, in 1999, that was vetoed by China. In fact, since 2020 and 2024, 264 out of 284 UN resolutions were passed by the Security Council, with only 20 rejected. This happened without anyone exercising a veto. The Government might look at those facts.

On the issue of democracy, solemn national declarations, not wishy-washy statements, were attached to both the Lisbon and Nice treaties and endorsed by the Irish people to protect the triple lock. The triple lock is writ large in those declarations. I urge Government Ministers to check those two declarations. I have read them carefully and the triple lock is there in them to

protect our neutrality, which people were concerned about. Any attempt to change the law or to undo those national declarations by the sovereign people is wrong. It is theirs to change only and not holding a referendum is a denial of democracy and a slap in the face to Irish citizens. Despite saturation levels of coverage to drop neutrality and the triple lock, successive opinion polls show that the majority of the electorate wants to retain our neutrality. Our neutrality has given us a level of credibility internationally and is our best defence against aggression because we do not pose a threat to other countries. We should work with other neutral and non-aligned countries to build multilateralism. I accept that the UN needs to be reformed but we should work to reform it and not join in with the warmongers, those who are beating the war drums at the behest of the arms industry and western superpowers.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: This Bill proposes a fundamental change to Ireland's long-standing approach to overseas military deployments. Despite the significance of this Bill, the Government will guillotine the debate in this House, denying Members the scrutiny and debate that such a proposal deserves. Whatever your view on the triple lock, surely we can all agree that legislation of this magnitude warrants careful examination. This Bill is not a minor technical amendment. It removes a core plank that has shaped Irish defence policy for decades. It changes the legal basis on which members of our Defence Forces can be deployed overseas on peace enforcement missions, yet the Government seems determined to use its majority to curtail debate and avoid the detailed scrutiny that a change of this nature demands. That is disgraceful.

The central purpose of this Bill it to remove the requirement for a UN mandate before Irish troops can participate in certain overseas missions. The existing requirement for a UN mandate will be removed and replaced with a new framework allowing participation in a much broader range of international forces. Crucially, the Bill does not draw a distinction between peacekeeping and peace enforcement. The Green Party does not support that change. We do not believe that Irish troops should participate in peace enforcement missions without a UN mandate. Peace enforcement missions are fundamentally different from traditional peacekeeping operations. Peacekeeping missions generally operate with the consent of the parties involved in a conflict but peace enforcement missions, by contrast, can involve deployment where such consent does not exist. They carry different risks, different political implications and different consequences for our country's international standing. In those circumstances, we believe that the legitimacy confirmed by a UN mandate remains essential.

The debate around the triple lock has been framed by the Government as a debate about the legitimacy of the UN Security Council. This framing is wrong. Supporting the triple lock does not mean believing that the UN is perfect; it is not. The UN needs reform. The operation of the Security Council needs reform. There is a strong case for giving a greater role to the General Assembly and for modernising structures that reflect the realities of 1945 rather than those of today, but acknowledging the need for reform is not a reason to abandon the institution. At a time when multilateralism is under pressure all over the world, when international law is increasingly challenged and when powerful states are seeking to act outside international norms, Ireland should be strengthening its commitment to international institutions, not weakening it. For small countries such as Ireland, the UN has always mattered. It is one of the few places where countries of our size can influence global affairs on the basis of principle rather than power. Our proud record in UN peacekeeping demonstrates exactly that.

The Government argues that removing the triple lock will increase flexibility but flexibility should never come at the expense of legitimacy, nor should this debate be presented as a choice between supporting the triple lock and supporting our Defence Forces. Improving the capacity of our Defence Forces does not require us to abandon an important safeguard governing overseas deployment. These are separate questions and should be treated as such. Ultimately, this debate is about the kind of country Ireland wants to be. Do we want to remain committed to the multilateral approach that has guided Irish foreign policy for generations? Do we continue to insist that peace enforcement operations involving Irish troops should carry the legitimacy of a UN mandate? Do we recognise that as a small state, our interests are best served by strengthening international institutions rather than weakening them? The Green Party's answer to each of those questions is "Yes" and for this reason, I will oppose this Bill.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Irish neutrality and the triple lock are the property of the Irish people. They are not the property of any individual Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Minister or political party. Any proposed change must be put to the Irish people. The triple lock has already been endorsed by the Irish people in two sovereign referendums.

6 o'clock

These were the second referendums on both the Nice and Lisbon treaties, and it has been acknowledged in the EU Seville Declaration. It was also specifically referenced in the explanatory booklet delivered to every house in the country prior to the second referendum on the Lisbon treaty. Any change must be put to the Irish people. We need to be clear that the Bill does not reform or amend the triple lock; it removes and abolishes the triple lock.

If the triple lock is abolished then any Irish Government will be able to send Irish soldiers to any conflict around the world through a simple Government majority. These missions will not be peacekeeping missions; they will be peace enforcement missions. They will be aggressive and military fighting missions with everything this entails. It has been suggested by some people that the triple lock impinges on our ability to protect our own people and our own country. This is not so. This failure lies at the feet of the Minister, the Government and previous Governments. Fine Gael has been in power since 2011 and Fianna Fáil since at least 2016. The fact our Defence Forces have been so run down, to the extent that we do not have enough sailors to man our ships or enough airmen to fly our planes, the reduction in our soldier numbers, the closure of our military barracks such as Kickham Barracks in Clonmel, and the poor pay and conditions of our soldiers, is the responsibility of the Government. It has nothing to do with the triple lock. The suggestion that permanent members of the United Nations Security Council have a veto on Irish peacekeeping missions is deeply dishonest. The fact is that the Irish people have themselves, in two sovereign referendums, with no outside interference, decided on the basis on which Irish soldiers can be involved in peacekeeping missions.

I want to address Fianna Fáil TDs, who have the power to stop this Bill. I call on each and every one of them to do so tonight. The triple lock is Fianna Fáil. The triple lock is Fianna Fáil history. Éamon de Valera, the founder of Fianna Fáil, a Taoiseach and a President, put peaceful settlement of international disputes into the Constitution. He declared Irish neutrality in 1939. Bertie Ahern, a former Fianna Fáil Taoiseach, put the triple lock into the Nice treaty. Brian Cowen, a former Fianna Fáil Taoiseach, put the triple lock into the Lisbon treaty. Bertie

Ahern says he is opposed to the abolition of the triple lock. Éamon Ó Cuív, a former Minister and deputy leader of Fianna Fáil, says he is opposed to the abolition of the triple lock. Deputy Willie O'Dea, former Minister for Defence, says he is opposed to the abolition of triple lock. Even the current Taoiseach has said that the triple lock is at the core of our neutrality. The question for Fianna Fáil TDs tonight is whether they will disown their own history-----

Deputy Erin McGreehan: I will tell you about history.

Deputy Seamus Healy: -----or whether they going to stand up for neutrality and for the triple lock, which is a core value for Fianna Fáil. This is a watershed moment for Fianna Fáil tonight.

Deputy Joe Neville: This is obviously a difficult debate for many and it is very important that we do get to have this discussion on the importance of democracy. It also shows us the importance of legislation and this is ultimately what we are deciding tonight. The ability of Irish people to make their own decisions is something that has been forgotten on the far side of the House. I represent North Kildare, which is a constituency with a high number of Defence Forces personnel, some of whom are based in the Curragh and many others who travel into Dublin on a daily basis, to Baldonnel or different areas around Dublin. It is important that we are making reforms. I thank the Minister, Deputy McEntee, for her work and her Department's work on reform of disciplinary procedures. This is badly needed and they are fully welcomed.

The main topic of contention we are talking about in this debate is the triple lock. The triple lock allows five permanent members of the UN to decide where we send our troops. These countries are China, Russia, France, the UK and the United States. They get to tell us what we do with our troops and how to run our country. Our country was founded over 100 years ago and it has changed, and we have a proud tradition. We have a tradition of helping other countries. We have a tradition of sending peacekeeping forces as we wished and we were neutral even prior to the UN. This will change nothing. Instead, these changes will renew our ability to pursue an independent, neutral foreign policy, where we as an Irish people decide, and do not have the decisions made in the Kremlin, Washington or even London. The Opposition would typically have significant issues with it if they were making decisions for our State.

We have the ability to act what translates as our values into actions. The people whom Irish personnel have protected have looked at Irish people as peacekeepers and as some of the best people they could ever hope to have. There is no reason we cannot continue this tradition, However, we have been stopped from having this tradition and could well be stopped in the future, and this is what we are trying to change here tonight. We are willing to act in the defence of international law and the UN Charter and not just speak about it. We are willing to help where we can. Ireland will remain a neutral country as we pride ourselves on being one and nothing will change in this regard.

Deputy Erin McGreehan: It is very worrying to listen to some of the contributions from the Opposition on the Bill. It is absolutely incredible that our Opposition disrespect and do not trust our Defence Forces, do not trust our independent State and do not trust our sovereignty, and want others to make decisions for us. This independence and the proud tradition of neutrality our State proclaims is of huge significance. I hold these things very dear as does

everyone on these benches. The only people I hear suggesting that Ireland is about to abandon its neutrality are Members of the Opposition and shame on them all. I have sat outside and inside these Houses with some of the very same people, listening to them pontificate about misinformation, disinformation and the dangers of frightening people with things that simply are not true. I agree with them. Misinformation is a serious issue but surely the same standards should apply to all issues and not just when it is politically expedient for people and when it suits the Opposition. Frightening people about Irish neutrality makes a great headline but does not make for good politics and certainly does not make for honest debate.

From a Louth perspective, and I will give Deputy Healy a little bit of history, the former Minister for defence and for external affairs, Frank Aiken, who is often spoken about as a reason to keep the triple lock, spoke about the rationale.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Fianna Fáil history.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

Deputy Erin McGreehan: I would say that he would absolutely hate that there is a foreign influence on Óglaigh na hÉireann. Frank Aiken oversaw the first peacekeeping mission without the triple lock. Was he not neutral? Were our soldiers doing something wrong without the triple lock? Absolutely not. During his many years at the UN, just like he fought for independence, he spent much of his political life championing the rights of independence of small sovereign states. He was very clear about Ireland's international position. He said at the UN that we are not in NATO but that did not mean that we should be regarded as neutral. I disagree with him on that because we are neutral. He also stated that on the contrary, we have emphasised over and over again that we are on the side of western democracies.

That is something we do not hear very often and it is from our own Frank Aiken. He understood perfectly well that military neutrality did not mean political neutrality. He understood that Ireland could stand on its own two feet, remain outside military alliances and still have a strong voice in the world. Above all, he understood sovereignty. He was a man who commanded soldiers during the struggle for independence and lived through partition. He understood better than most what it meant for Ireland to make its own decisions. I believe we did a disservice to Frank Aiken's legacy by accepting a system that would allow foreign governments to have an effective veto over certain decisions concerning the deployment of our own Óglaigh na hÉireann. I do not believe this is what Frank Aiken envisaged for our independent State.

There is so much to this that I support but we cannot put up with hypocrisy from the Opposition. I am sure we are well-versed with the hypocrisy we heard from them today. The main Opposition party are often infantilised by the Brits and of course they do not want to take the Brits out of politics. They want decisions to be at the mercy of London, Moscow, Washington, Beijing or Paris.

Deputy Barry Ward: I actually agree with Frank Aiken, which is not necessarily a comfortable position for me to be in, but I do not think we are neutral either. I am glad we are not neutral. We are not neutral on Gaza. We are not neutral on Ukraine.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: That is political neutrality.

Deputy Barry Ward: We are not neutral on human rights abuses or breaches of international law and I am glad that we are not.

I am much prouder of a country that is willing to stand up and speak for what is right and lawful than anything else.

I do, however, believe in our military non-alignment. That is a principle close to the hearts of the Irish people. The notion that young Irish men and women would be sent off to fight in foreign wars is something we abhor, and that is not what this is about. We have an incredibly proud tradition of peacekeeping. It is not peace enforcement, but peacekeeping. The reality, however, is that our policy on peacekeeping and our ability to engage in peacekeeping is determined not by us as a sovereign State of more than 100 years standing but by a committee of many countries, some of whom are rogue states, in my opinion, sitting around the Security Council table. Countries like Russia, China and even now the United States are not reliable partners in terms of international peace. They are certainly not countries I want deciding whether our troops can serve in a peacekeeping mission abroad or not.

We are grown-ups now. Let us behave like grown-ups. Let us take back our self-imposed restrictions on our ability to determine where our military goes. Let us take them back and decide where we are. Let us be also clear, however, that a decision to remove the triple lock is not a vote of no confidence in the UN. Deputy O'Gorman is quite right. The UN is really important for Ireland and our role in the UN is really important and it is something that people feel very strongly about and are very proud of but the removal of the triple lock would actually allow us to make sovereign decisions as a sovereign country and a member of the global community.

Additionally, one of the red herrings in this debate is the Seville Declaration from 2002. The Seville Declaration did not create the triple lock nor, in fact, did it enshrine it in Irish law. We did that ourselves. The Seville Declaration was the European Union, at our request, giving an assurance to Irish people that our policy on military non-alignment would be respected. That policy is not changing. That neutrality is not changing, as some people are saying. People are saying that if we remove the triple lock, the Irish Government will be able to make a decision about where troops are deployed. Yes, it will. As the sovereign representatives of the people of Ireland, it will.

Deputy Seamus Healy: The people have spoken already. They have said it twice.

Deputy Barry Ward: Deputy Healy is the one who said that.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Twice.

Deputy Barry Ward: Let Deputy Healy tell me this. I ask him to identify the party in this Chamber that is proposing to be involved in wars abroad. I ask him to identify the group in this Chamber that is telling us we want to get rid of this policy of military non-alignment. There is no such group. There is no such party. How can the Deputy have a fear that is well-founded

that we are somehow going to trample on that policy of military non-alignment when nobody in here is suggesting we should do that? What we should do instead is trust in the sovereignty of this Chamber and the Government of this country to make serious decisions for this country.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before I go to Deputy Daly, Deputy Healy is incapable of affording other Members the respect of listening to their contribution without interruption. If he cannot do that, he can watch the debate in his office. He is free to leave. I call Deputy Martin Daly.

Deputy Martin Daly: Ireland is a mature representative republic and democracy, and we fought long and hard for our independence and the right to make decisions as a sovereign nation. It is simply inexplicable to me that the Opposition is purporting to oppose a situation where we are going to take back that right to make our own decisions by our own public representatives, our elected representatives, and an elected Government. We are uniquely positioned in the world as the only country that subcontracts out our decision-making to a third party. That third party is now not just a group of democratic nations but a group of nations not functioning normally. We have got Russia, China and the United States under Trump. Another part of this I cannot understand, again from Sinn Féin, is that we allow the United Kingdom to make decisions about where we deploy our troops, our Defence Forces, on a peacekeeping mission.

There is a conflation of this argument with the loss of neutrality. The suggestion that the reform of the triple lock, or taking back the triple lock, is the loss of neutrality is simply a false narrative. We are not neutral. We are politically aligned to the European Union and to democracies in the West. We are militarily neutral, and rightly so. We have very little to offer militarily to any third force if we were so minded. I just want to reiterate what my colleagues have said on this side of the House. The suggestion that any party in this Dáil, in this Parliament, is suggesting that we are going to embark on wars of adventure and send our young people across Europe or elsewhere in the world to participate in wars of adventure with empires is simply not credible.

Abolishing the triple lock does not mean that we abandon multilateralism. We should also think about our own armed forces, our Defence Forces, in terms of their contribution as peacekeepers. It is a very proud tradition but, most importantly, it allows our Defence Forces to develop experience and training that keeps them in full readiness, rather than being cocooned in Ireland.

People have quoted history. Seán Lemass was absolutely clear that we were not politically neutral. He was absolutely clear about that but we are militarily neutral. The repeal of the triple lock will not affect that position.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Micheál Martin called the triple lock the core of Ireland's military neutrality, and now he wants to get rid of it. The question must be asked: whose interest is the Taoiseach serving and what price is he willing to ask young Irish people to pay for his personal ambitions? The triple lock means Irish troops can only be sent overseas as part of an international force with Government sign-off, with Dáil approval and with the UN mandate. Our military neutrality keeps us out of those military blocs and those conflicts that are not ours to fight. It prevents craven Irish leaders falling to outside pressure and sending

our young people to fight in military missions shaped by the big powers. It gives us the credibility to speak up for peace, for justice and international law, and it has long underpinned our proud tradition of peacekeeping. The UN absolutely needs reform but do not use its limitations as an excuse to scrap our neutrality. Spare us this talk of sovereignty as well. We remember Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael bending to the Troika. We remember Ministers gutting legislation after late-night phone calls from the embassy. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were paid off with cushy jobs, or more often, just a few slaps on the back. The Irish people do not trust the Government to stand up to international pressure.

At Nice and Lisbon, the people were asked to vote with guarantees of neutrality, including the triple lock. Now, the Government wants to remove that safeguard without asking the people. It can tie itself up in legal niceties but why is it afraid of a referendum? If it really believes it is right, let the Irish people make their decision. Put it to the people because Irish neutrality belongs to the Irish people, and not to Micheál Martin, not to Simon Harris, and not to this or any Government.

Deputy Martin Kenny: The United Nations is a vital international body that so many countries around the world pay such respect to. It was founded after the two World Wars to try to ensure we would never be in that place again. It is so important that we remain part of that and continue to be an integral part of that whole idea that the countries of the world can come together to ensure that peace can be delivered. That is why it is so important that we keep the triple lock, that we keep our independence and that we keep the United Nations as central to that.

The United Nations needs reform. Of course, it is not perfect but the distance we see ourselves travelling now is towards some kind of European military union, which is on the cards. If we look around Europe and ask what that context will look like in the future, in many of the countries, the key countries in Europe, which are the power blocs of Europe, Germany, France and Italy, we see very fascist regimes potentially coming into power. If we are going to be part of that, where is that influence going to bring us? Where is it going to see Ireland end up and, indeed, so many other countries in the world who look to the people we talk about as being the problem with the triple lock, the Putins and the Trumps of the world? They are the heroes of many of the people who could be in power in Europe in the next decade.

We have to be very careful what we sign up to and what we move away from. It is vitally important that we understand that the Irish people of all generations, from young to old, recognise that our neutrality is absolutely vital. They see, as they have been told by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and other Governments in the past, that the triple lock is an integral part of that. To dismantle that and take it away is simply duplicity. We cannot do that. If the Government wants to do that, it should hold a referendum and ask the people. I know what the answer will be, as does everyone else, and that is why this Government will not do that. It will try to have a sleight of hand to remove the triple lock behind people's backs and that simply is not good enough. The Government can use any excuse it likes but it should recognise the people of Ireland do not want this to happen. If it is going to happen, put it to a referendum and see what they say. The Government will get its answer.

Deputy Michael Collins: The core of this Bill is about making it easier for Irish troops to be deployed overseas. For this to happen, Independent Ireland is very strong in its belief that the people of Ireland will have to have their say.

This would be by holding a referendum, simply. What is the Minister afraid of? If she is convinced it is right, is she saying the people of Ireland are stupid? No, put it to the people and let them make their minds up and then we will walk clear here, if that is acceptable to the people of Ireland, but it will not be accepted by the people of Ireland. It will be totally rejected. The Government is afraid to put it to them and shamefully is pushing this through. This is why Independent Ireland cannot support this in its current form.

For decades Ireland's long-standing approach has been built around what people know as the triple lock - Government approval, Dáil approval and United Nations authorisation. This legislation removes one of those safeguards. The Government argues that the United Nations system can be blocked by vetoes and that Ireland needs greater flexibility but the answer to frustrations within the UN cannot be to weaken our own protections. The United Nations mandate requirement has always provided an important test of international legitimacy. It ensured that Irish troops were participating in missions that had broad international backing rather than becoming involved in operations driven by the interests of larger powers and political blocs. Once that safeguard is removed the threshold for participation becomes lower. The Government can call it reform but the public will see it for what it is - a significant change in how decisions are made about sending Irish servicemen and women overseas. We should always be honest with the people. This Bill does not abolish military neutrality and does not sign Ireland up to a military alliance. But it does weaken one of the key protections that has helped reassure generations of Irish people that our Defence Forces will only serve overseas under clear international authority. This is a very significant step.

I am equally concerned about the reduction in parliamentary oversight. Under the current arrangements, deployment above 12 personnel generally requires Dáil approval. This Bill increases that threshold to 50 personnel, which is more than a fourfold increase. The Government says this is needed for operational flexibility. If that is the case then let the Government make the evidence-based case for it. What we should not do is give future governments broader powers to deploy substantial numbers of troops overseas while reducing the direct role of the Dáil. Informing an Oireachtas committee after a decision has been made is not the same as obtaining the approval of the elected representatives of the Irish people before that decision is made. Those are very different things.

Independent Ireland believes that reforms to discipline, accountability, evacuation operations and the protection of Irish citizens abroad should be dealt with on their own merits. Those measures should not be used to justify the removal of the UN element of the triple lock or the dilution of parliamentary scrutiny.

Our Defence Forces have built a proud reputation throughout the world as peacekeepers. They deserve clear rules, clear accountability and public confidence in the missions they undertake. For those reasons, I call on the Government to reconsider these proposals, and retain the requirements for a UN authorisation and maintain strong Dáil oversight over the overseas military deployments. Ireland's neutrality, the authority of this House and the confidence of the Irish people should not be weakened by this legislation.

When I look around I do not see the Independents that are supporting the Government. Are they going to support this nonsense tonight? Are they going to railroad over the Irish people's viewpoints of this? There is a national outcry. I call on every Independent that supports this Government to stand up tonight and support the people of Ireland and vote this out, and vote for the ordinary people who are begging them to do so because they know what the Government is up to.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this Bill. I was thinking today that it is no wonder the public are losing complete faith in politics considering what the present leader of this country stated in 2013 or 2014 about the triple lock and then he tries to defend something today. That is hypocrisy, in my opinion. You do not do that. People lose faith if you act that way.

We remember the Nice treaty. The medicine we seem to dose out to the Irish people is that if they do not what is believed to be what Europe wants then we will go back to the polls again for a second time. We have done it in two treaties. We told people not worry, that we will protect X, Y and Z. What have we done? What have we done on the migration side of it? Under the Lisbon treaty we have decided to give what we had away. We had a right to decide ourselves. What have we done under the Nice treaty? The same thing when it comes to this and then you wonder why people do not vote and lose hope in politicians right across the board.

Look at the United Nations. At the moment we have a few guys around the world. Donald Trump is doing what he wants. Putin will do what he wants. Netanyahu will do what he wants. Someone will come out and say it is a war crime, but every single country in Europe let a plane fly right across for a guy to go to America, across their airspace, and they said nothing. They closed their eyes. We were complicit with those people but still we will go out in suits and shake hands, talk to each other and look important, as if it is a big deal.

Ireland made a big thing out of getting a seat at the United Nations table and now we are saying we need to pull things back from them. You would wonder are we talking out of two sides of our mouth or what are we playing at. You would also wonder what are we doing when a few years ago, in the Taoiseach's own constituency, we did not have the personnel for the vessels that were actually to support and protect our country. That was some statement. At the moment, under the EU Presidency, there are other vessels offshore. The first thing you would want to do when you go looking after defence is to start protecting your own backdoor but we are not doing it at the moment. We are reliant and we have decided to rely on others. Imagine, we had vessels down in Cork and because of pay and conditions people had left and walked away, and then we talk about ourselves as if we are going to be the Messiah that is going to keep peace around the world, that we are going to send X amount of people and they are going to look after it, while at the same time when they talk about drones, when there are people coming into this country, supposedly drones going around beside them, we cannot give or write a report on them, and no-one knows where they came from, what they did, whether they disappeared and what happened to them. We do not know but then we are going to make sure that we will give away any bit.

Who is calling the shots? I would love to know what is the endgame in all of this. Who is promised what? That is the answer that I would love to know and it would be a sad day if we decided tonight to give away this.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: When the people rejected the Nice treaty and then the Lisbon treaty, they did it on a promise that the triple lock would stay - a UN mandate, a Government decision and the adoption and approval of this House. That promise won the vote of subsequent referendums afterwards. I know because I canvassed for them at the time and that was the deal, the deal this Government is trying to break tonight.

In 2013, the Taoiseach told this House that the triple lock was at the core of Irish neutrality. The Fianna Fáil 2020 manifesto committed itself to keeping it. The reality is that nobody has voted or given a mandate for this legislative change. We must then ask ourselves in this House the following. Who and what has changed the Taoiseach's mind? It is not coming from Dublin, it certainly is not coming from Cork and it looks like to me that it is either coming from Brussels or perhaps Paris. We must, therefore, look at the old quote by Cicero: "*Cui bono*?", "Who benefits?". We know one thing for sure, Irish neutrality does not benefit.

Everyone in this building knows that the Fianna Fáil backbenchers are uneasy in this debate tonight. We hear it in the corridors and the whispers in the tearooms. I am surprised when people invoke the name for Frank Aiken in the House. I imagine that man is spinning in his grave when he looks at Fianna Fáil today and who leads Fianna Fáil today. We will see what those backbenchers who are shouting and roaring in the corridors here tonight about their leader, what they will do when the division is called but I would not hold my breath for any of them to grow a spine. After all, we saw what they did during the presidential election.

Our neutrality has been one of Ireland's defending and defining strengths since the foundation of this State. It has helped establish the identity of the State as an independent nation that is committed to peacemaking, diplomacy and international law.

An Ceann Comhairle: Time is up. Deputy Paul Lawless.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: If the Government is secure on this then call a referendum.

An Ceann Comhairle: Time is up, thank you. Deputy Paul Lawless.

Deputy Paul Lawless: Irish neutrality and the triple lock belong to the Irish people. Micheál Martin said a number of years ago that the triple lock was the core part of our neutrality. Why has the Taoiseach now changed his mind? That is the question we must understand because it is not coming from the Irish people, it is not coming from the Opposition, and it is certainly not coming from the backbenches of Fianna Fáil. What is the interest here? Is it a plush job in the next number of years? It is not coming from the Irish people. In fact, the Irish people effectively passed the triple lock by way of a referendum. Over 20 years ago the people voted against the Nice treaty, and they did so because they had concerns about neutrality and the potential of the erosion of Irish neutrality. To allay those concerns, the Taoiseach at the time, Fianna Fáil Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, guaranteed the triple lock in law. Subsequently, the second Nice treaty was passed as a result of the reassurance provided to the Irish people at the time. Essentially, the triple lock was passed by way of referendum. That is what happened. We all know that is why the second Nice treaty was passed. We in Aontú are very clear. If this was passed by way of referendum, let us put it to the people by way of referendum. Let the people have their decision.

I have listened to speeches about sovereignty from Government TDs. Sovereignty is letting the people decide. The people should decide this by way of referendum. The Minister talks about sovereignty but this is the same Government that handed Brussels control over our migration policy. The EU migration and asylum pact was passed by this Government and decisions will now will be made by Brussels in terms of how many asylum seekers we will take and what fines we may face if we cannot take them. Is that what the Minister means by sovereignty? The treatment by this Government of the Irish people and the absolute nonsense it is feeding them is an utter disgrace. What about the people involved in fisheries in this country and how they were treated? Where is their sovereignty? The Government again handed control over to Brussels. The truth is that the Irish people support the triple lock, and that is why the Government will not put this to a referendum. It has absolutely nothing to do with sovereignty. The Taoiseach knows that this would not pass by way of referendum and that is why he has called a quick vote here tonight.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: People around the country are absolutely shocked with what is happening today. This Bill is one of the most shocking attacks on Irish democracy I have ever seen. This Bill puts the Irish Government directly in conflict with the democratic decisions of the people of this country.

Irish neutrality is one of the most important foreign policies of this country. The policy of peace is more important than ever. This is a time of great instability. The whole world is starting to tool up in terms of militarism, and the EU has morphed from a peace project to one that is openly preparing for war.

The second importance of Irish neutrality is the issue of sovereignty. The Irish Government is actively seeking to outsource Irish foreign and military policy to the EU. The EU is pushing hard for the development of an EU defence union and ultimately, an EU army. The EU military hawks are circling, and Micheál Martin is bending the knee. Macron has stated that 26 countries have now pledged to put boots on the ground in Ukraine, and the Government radically seeks to speed up the accession of Ukraine into the EU. This Bill could put Irish men and women in the way of conflict, and if we go down this road, ultimately, this country will have very little say over the decisions that are made. Small countries are sceptical at the intentions of military blocks because military blocks make military decisions on the basis of their own self-interest and economic objectives. To look at another small country, for example, Denmark participated in Iraq as well as in the war in Afghanistan. It lost as many soldiers *per capita* as the US. The Government will dress this up in the whole idea of peace, but peace is a euphemism. Remember that America attacked Iraq on the basis of peace, and it led to the deaths of 600,000 people.

The Government is stating, and this is such rubbish, that the reason this is happening is because the triple lock puts Russia, the US, and China in charge. The whole idea of the triple lock is that when military blocks such as Russia, China and the US are in opposition in the security council, taking sides with either group is, by definition, military alignment. Micheál Martin is shredding the democratic will of the Irish people. We know that the triple lock is directly linked to the second Nice referendum. However, Micheál Martin is also shredding the core values of Fianna Fáil. What is the difference between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael if we take this away? It is interesting because Micheál Martin is on his last legs as leader of Fianna Fáil, but he is acting as a wrecking ball to the core values of Fianna Fáil on his way out. I

appeal to backbenchers in Fianna Fáil to stand up for peace and neutrality, and vote against this Fine Gael Bill.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: Like others, I value our neutrality, and insofar as it is reflected in our Constitution, we have a number of checks and balances. Article 29 commits Ireland to peace, international justice and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Following the Lisbon Treaty, it also explicitly provides that Ireland shall not adopt any decision relating to a common defence of the European Union. I am comfortable with these arrangements remaining as they are, although some argue that Ireland should be prepared to demonstrate greater military solidarity with other European states, particularly the smaller Baltic nations and others like Poland if they are faced with real and serious aggression, and that aggression is becoming a higher risk. It is a legitimate debate to have, even within our own European affairs committee.

However, it would represent a profound change in Irish policy, and that sort of thing should only occur after a proper discussion. That type of debate should ultimately go to a vote of the Irish people. At the same time, I acknowledge that there is a practical issue with the current triple lock mechanism, as I said in previous contributions, because the UN Security Council can and has been paralysed by the veto of permanent members, and that is likely to go on for quite a while. Any General Assembly recommendations are not legally binding, so if we want to have peacekeeping missions which might otherwise command broad international support, we have to find other ways around it. We have earned enormous respect for our participation in operations over the years. We have served with distinction in Lebanon, the Golan Heights, and Chad. We sacrificed our lives in these and other places like Congo, and we should ensure that genuine peacekeeping operations can continue into the future.

I am going to put out something I have raised before, which is that while I am not wedded to any single mechanism, one option to keep a triple lock, if we get rid of that of the UN, is to require a supermajority in both Houses of the Oireachtas. I mentioned 80% at one stage, and perhaps that is too high. Perhaps it should be two thirds. We need to have a chat about it, but the assent of Dáil and Seanad Éireann before troops are deployed on missions which currently require triple lock assent could be a workable solution. It could not be said that the Government of the day, with a couple of people in the majority, can make such decisions. It needs wider debate, and that is the political consensus as representative democracy. Obviously, we need to discuss other constitutional issues down the line in terms of changing any sort of military alliance within the European context.

We cannot separate this debate from the condition of our Defence Forces, as we have so many long-standing deficiencies in terms of recruitment, retention, abuse of members, gaps in maritime surveillance and air-defence radar coverage. The report on the Commission of the Defence Forces highlighted the need for substantial reform and investment. We also had the issues of pay and conditions. This week, the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers expressed huge frustration over delays in delivering promised improvements and pointed to a ruling upheld by the Council of Europe that Defence Forces personnel are not being adequately compensated through pay or time off for overtime and public holiday works. They are earning as little as €4 per hour for certain duties that, in any other circumstance, would be called overtime. Whatever our views on this triple lock debate, we should have common agreement in this House that the men and women who serve our State deserve fair remuneration and conditions.

I am paired tonight, so I cannot get to vote on Second Stage. As is, I would vote against it, but I look forward, assuming it is passed, to having further discussions on this matter.

Deputy John Lahart: There is so much hysteria on the Opposition benches today, so let me reassure people from the outset that his debate is not about ending Irish neutrality, it is not about joining NATO and it definitely is not about creating a European army. This debate is about one thing. It is about our independence and whether we in Ireland should retain the sovereign right to decide for ourselves when and where we participate in peacekeeping missions. For decades, Ireland has earned an international reputation far beyond its size through the courage and professionalism of its Defence Forces. No country in the world has a longer unbroken record of service in UN peacekeeping than Ireland. Every day since June 1958, Irish men and women have served under the blue helmet in the pursuit of peace. This is not just part of our history; it is part of who we are as a nation - a peaceful nation.

However, the uncomfortable truth is that the triple lock means we cannot do that any more. The triple lock was meant to ensure continuity in peacekeeping and sadly that is no longer the world we live in. Today, it does quite the opposite. The Security Council can effectively veto whether or where Ireland sends its Defence Forces. The Opposition cannot credibly claim to defend Irish sovereignty. Sinn Féin, the party whose very name means "ourselves alone", would leave Ireland dependent on a system where Russia or China can determine where Ireland sends its peacekeepers. Sinn Féin, ironically, would allow Britain more say than our Parliament over where we deploy our peacekeepers. This House is elected by the people of Ireland. The Irish Government is elected by Members of this House and ultimately the Opposition does not trust the elected representatives of the people. If you believe in Irish democracy, you should have the confidence to allow democratic decisions to be made here in this House by Members sent here by the people.

Let me reassure everyone again. When it comes to deploying peacekeepers or Irish troops, any deployment will still have to comply with the United Nations Charter and international law. A majority of elected representatives in this House will still be required to support it, and Government approval will still be required.

The Opposition is trying to confuse and bewilder people. A number of things can be true at the same time. It is true that our commitment to the UN is unwavering and no Government has defended the UN more than the Government of Ireland, as evidenced by its defence of UNRWA. It is also true that the desire of Ireland to continue its valuable-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Conor Sheehan): Your time is up, Deputy.

Deputy John Lahart: -----work as an international peacekeeper remains steadfast.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Conor Sheehan): You are eating into your colleagues' time.

Deputy John Lahart: Finally, it is true that we equally want-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Conor Sheehan): Deputy, please.

Deputy John Lahart: -----the preservation of our tradition of military neutrality.

Deputy Micheál Carrigy: The triple lock is a mechanism that governs the deployment of our Army personnel overseas. The reality is it is a system that is broken and the legislation being brought forward by the Minister is about fixing it. These changes will renew our peacekeeping. Tonight I think of my cousin who serves in the Defence Forces. Marie Carrigy served in the Golan Heights, Congo and Lebanon and is currently abroad serving on a UN mission. If we do not fix a broken triple lock, Ireland will no longer be able to contribute to peacekeeping in the way we have done for the past 60 years. From 1972 until the barracks closed in 2009, hundreds of members from Sean Connolly Barracks in Longford served as Defence Forces members on peacekeeping duties, particularly in Lebanon. One of the most recent deployments to Lebanon was led by Lieutenant Colonel Mark Lennon with a significant number of members who are now in Custume Barracks in Athlone.

What the triple lock does is allow the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to veto where we send our peacekeepers. They dictate what members of our Defence Forces do. We must be able to make our own democratic decisions about where we send our peacekeepers. Decisions about where we send them should be made in Ireland by the democratically elected Dáil, as Deputy Lahart has said, not by Russia, the United States or Vladimir Putin. Strong safeguards will remain. It will need Government approval, Dáil oversight and strict adherence to the UN Charter and international law. These changes will renew our ability to pursue an independent and neutral foreign policy and an ability to act in a way that translates our values as a country into actions. There is a reassertion and strengthening of our neutrality because this will allow us to choose where we send our peacekeepers in defence of the principles of the UN charter, which we have done for decades. The people Irish personnel have protected need countries that are willing to act in defence of international law and the UN Charter, not just words.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: I am regularly contacted regarding the triple lock and fully recognise that strongly held beliefs exist on all sides of this debate. I have met members of the Defence Forces who strongly support the proposed changes and I have heard firmly held opposition from others. In my view, legitimate arguments have been advanced on both sides and I do not believe sufficient clear and accessible information has been provided to the public on either the existing triple lock arrangements or the proposed reforms. I was one of those people who sought additional time to consider the Bill given its significance for Ireland's longstanding approach to peacekeeping and foreign policy.

Having carefully considered the legislation, I believe it is important to focus on what the proposed changes actually involve. Ireland has a proud and respected record of participation in the United Nations peacekeeping missions and nothing in this legislation diminishes that commitment. The legislation relates to peacekeeping operations and not a change to Ireland's policy of military neutrality. A central issue is the current requirement for a UN Security Council mandate before Ireland can participate in certain peacekeeping missions. Under the existing system, a permanent member of the Security Council can effectively prevent Ireland's participation through the use of its veto. The concern is a significant factor behind the proposed legislation. The Bill would remove the requirement for a UN Security Council mandate when

deploying personnel to an international force engaged in peace operation. The proposed changes do not diminish Ireland's commitment to the United Nations. Rather, they address the ability of individual permanent members of the Security Council to exercise a veto over Irish participation.

The Sinn Féin motion does not adequately reflect the increasingly complex international security environment or the difficult foreign security and defence policy decisions facing the State. It also incorrectly categorises change to the triple lock as a change to Ireland's longstanding policy of military neutrality. Ireland's neutrality is defined by our non-membership of military alliances and common mutual defence arrangements. That position will not change. The proposed amendments will strengthen Ireland's ability to pursue independent foreign policy by removing the power of permanent members of the UN Security Council to veto such Irish sovereign decisions. In particular, neither Russia nor any other permanent Security Council member would be able to prevent Ireland from participating in peacekeeping missions approved by the Oireachtas. Any deployment of Defence Forces personnel overseas would still require Government and Dáil approval. The legislation does not alter Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality, nor does it affect the constitutional protections and guarantees endorsed by the people in the Nice and Lisbon treaty referendums regarding participation in common European defence arrangements.

Deputy Seán Kyne: The Minister and Minister of State are welcome. I agree with a lot of what has been said on all sides. The United Nations needs reform. If we were establishing the United Nations today, I do not think anyone would construct it in a way that there would be five countries with a veto, although one may argue that some of those countries would not join a body like the United Nations if they did not have such a veto. It is not a perfect body, but it is an important one that is respected in many parts of the world. We have had a strong voice in that regard. I agree that neutrality is important in the view of Irish people. We have a proud record as a militarily neutral country.

I am of the view that our neutrality is not impacted by the changes and reforms being proposed today in relation to the triple lock. As a former member of the defence and security committee, I sat through the pre-legislative scrutiny of this Bill, when we heard testimonies over a long number of sessions. I am happy to be able to support this Bill on foot of that. I believe that strong safeguards will remain - Government approval, Dáil oversight and strict adherence to the United Nations Charter and international law. Ireland remains committed to peacekeeping principles guided by international law, and that has to be the basis of our foreign and defence policy.

Tá veto ag gach ceann de na cúig buanbhaill de chuid Chomhairle Slándála na Náisiún Aontaithe. Ciallaíonn sé seo gur féidir le haon cheann acu bac a chur ar chinntí an Chomhairle Slándála, lena n-áirítear cinntí a bhaineann le síochánaíocht agus oibríochtaí slándála idirnáisiúnta. Tá sé ag cur bac ar fhórsaí cosanta na misin shíochánta a dhéanamh, a bhfuil siad bródúil astu le blianta fada. Níor tugadh cead d'aon mhisean nua síochánaíochta ó 2014 mar gheall ar an tsáinn sa Chomhairle Slándála. B'éigean dúinn tarraingt siar ó oibríocht chabhlaigh sa Mheánmhuir mar chuaigh ceadú Chomhairle Slándála na Náisiún Aontaithe in éag. Ag deireadh na bliana, beidh orainn tarraingt siar ón Liobáin tar éis beagnach 50 bliain.

There is and has been an impact due to the veto, not just on new missions since 2014 but on the continuation of some of the missions that we are part of. One in particular is the mission in Lebanon, where we have a proud record of peacekeeping, and which encourages many people to join the Defence Forces in order to be part of the peacekeeping forces overseas. Many people they know, perhaps family members, would have served on such missions. It is important that reform allows the democratically elected Irish Government to be able to send peacekeeping forces on such missions.

Deputy Shónagh Ní Raghallaigh: Deputy Micheál Martin does not own Irish neutrality. Irish neutrality is the cherished possession of each and every citizen on our island. The leader of Fianna Fáil may hold the title of An Taoiseach, but he would do well to remember that this is a title bestowed on him by the very Irish people who own our neutrality. The promise of neutrality was secured, ironclad, in the clauses of the Nice and Lisbon treaties that Ireland and Sinn Féin fought so hard to secure. To go back on that promise of the triple lock is an affront to the democratically expressed wish of the people, and to do so would bring shame to this House. Yet the Taoiseach continues to hurl insult after insult at the intelligence of the Irish people as he suggests that we simply do not understand the implications of the triple lock that we voted for. In May, an Teachta Réada Cronin and I convened a very well-attended public meeting i gCill Dara on neutrality and the triple lock. It was very clear that our constituents understood and cherished the triple lock.

The Nice and Lisbon treaties were supposed to put this question to bed. Yet here we are today, as the Taoiseach poses as judge, jury and executioner, forcing a political stroke on this House that will have ramifications on my constituents and around this island for years to come. The Taoiseach may view this Bill as a political game, as a win for himself on his imaginary scorecard, but for my constituents in Kildare, particularly the vast number who serve in the Defence Forces and their families, this is an affront to them. It is not for the Taoiseach to play politics with people's livelihoods and safety as he hurtles us towards war games with his pals in the EU and NATO. This House agonised over PESCO and the European common defence policy in order to protect our neutrality. The mind boggles at what has changed since then - that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are willing to throw the baby out with the bathwater in the abandonment of our cherished neutrality.

Ní le Rialtas na hÉireann neodracht na tíre seo. Ní liomsa í ach oiread. Is le muintir na hÉireann í agus is faoi mhuintir na hÉireann atá sé aon ghné di a athrú. Caithfidh aon athrú a thiocfaidh uirthi nó ar an nglas triarach a chur go reifreann láithreach.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: If we go out on the street at this point in time and ask people what their view is on the triple lock, if we ask them their view on the idea of neutrality and an independent foreign policy for Ireland, we will find they have an absolute belief in that. We all know the history of Ireland. It is a history of occupation, persecution and colonialism at its abject worst, and we still deal with the issues of partition and the fact that Britain has a say in the Six Counties. We know what imperial misadventure looks like. That is why the Irish people have an absolute love of independent foreign policy. What they also have is an absolute respect for those who have engaged in peacekeeping. I think of the sacrifices that have been made by Michael McNeela, Seán Rooney and many others.

What are we doing if we move away from the triple lock? It reveals our intention and shows the world that we are not secure in our position of neutrality. It shows that we are not secure in our position on the necessity and importance of the UN mandate, with all the difficulties that exist today. Now is not the time to move away from multilateralism. Now is not the time to abandon international law. What we need to see, if this Government really wants to make this move, is that it has the bravery and courage to go to the Irish people. That will not happen because the Irish people have absolute support for an independent foreign policy, as well as an absolute fear of moving away from neutrality in a very dangerous world and of the particular moves that are being made by those who believe might is right.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I approach this Bill with very serious concerns, particularly regarding the proposed changes to the triple lock mechanism and the direction of travel it signals for Irish foreign and defence policy. Let us be accurate and clear. Military neutrality is not some outdated concept that the teacher likes to talk about - or did a couple of years ago - that can be discerned according to the convenience of the Government. Neutrality has been a central pillar of the State since its foundation. It is part of who we are as a people. It has shaped our international reputation and allowed Ireland to be respected across the world as an honest broker, a peacekeeper and a humanitarian nation.

I compliment our peacekeepers going back to the Congo and since then for the obair stairiúil they did all over the world in very challenging situations. That is why the attempt to weaken and fundamentally alter safeguards surrounding the deployment of Irish troops overseas should not be decided solely within the walls of an teach sin, Leinster House. If the Government believes that the Irish people want a different approach to neutrality, then it should have the courage to say that and put that question directly to daoine na hÉireann, the Irish people. The Government's record with referendums has not been good in recent years, as the Aire agus Aire Stáit will know - they are from the same constituency, Meath East. The people have consistently supported Ireland's neutral status. It is not the property of any Government Minister or political party. It belongs to daoine na hÉireann, the Irish people, and they should have the final say on any significant changes to the principles that underpin it.

I am deeply concerned that the Government is seeking to chip away at democratic oversight and increase the threshold for Dáil approval for deployments from 12 to 50 personnel, which is another little one that has been slipped in. We are told this is merely administrative. How could it be an administrative change to go from 12 to 50? It is a practical measure. The argument simply does not stand up. When it comes to sending the proud members of our Defence Forces abroad, democratic accountability should be strengthened, not lessened.

I also have concerns regarding the expansion of missions outside traditional peacekeeping roles, including military security duties and close protection operations. I want the Defence Forces to be properly funded, which they are not, properly equipped and properly respected. As I said, its members have served us over many decades in many areas, and they need to be supported, not demonised and neglected by the Government. It is fine for Ministers to go over on St. Patrick’s Day and tell them how great they are, but the Ministers have a different plan.

7 o'clock

This House must be very careful before dismantling safeguards that have served this country well for generations. If there is to be any fundamental change to the triple lock or Ireland's

long-standing policy of military neutrality, the matter should be put before the people of Ireland. Anything less would be a travesty. The Government will not put it to the people. Cén fáth? Because it is afraid of its life of the people. The people elected the Government but they have grown tired of it. I served with the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, in the party. My father was a founding member of Fianna Fáil. He served 14 months in prison during the War of Independence. He was a proud founding member. Fianna Fáil has abandoned the principles of Seán Lemass, Eamon de Valera and all our forefathers, including Bertie Ahern and Brian Cowen. Fianna Fáil Deputies would sell their soul now for sixpence at the corner of a street. The Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, wants to bring people with him on his journey that he started a few years ago. He held his workshops all over the country, kind of roadshows - you would think it was a circus coming to town. It was a circus. He was told but he did not listen. Bhí a chluasa dúnta aige. He should have listened to the people. The Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, and I have debated this many times. I have stronger words to describe the Taoiseach but I will not use them here tonight, and what he is doing to the people of Ireland, to our reputation abroad, all in the self-interest of himself, the Minister of State, Deputy Dooley, and a few more capital beggars who want to be with him to get big jobs in Europe and further away, under the World Economic Forum or wherever else he can, and to hell with the people of Ireland. Bí ag éisteacht le daoine na hÉireann. They are the people who put you in here. They pay your wages. Respect them.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am glad to get the opportunity to speak on this. One of the big differences between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael going back the years was that Fine Gael wanted to get rid of the triple lock and Fianna Fáil did not. Even Deputy Micheál Martin in 2013 said it was at the heart and core of our neutrality. I cannot understand how he has changed so much to be in line with Fine Gael. It seems to me that there is no reason for having two different names now because everything they are doing is so united. There is no difference in the world between them. When a referendum on one of the treaties was going against them, they came out and said that the triple lock would never be got rid of. Here we are tonight and the Government is proposing to do just that. It is very unfair for it to use its majority in this way. It has a majority and will win this vote. If the Government was so sure of what it is doing, why does it not call a referendum and let the people of Ireland decide? They are the people who put me, the Ministers opposite and all of us in here. Get them to give the answer as to whether they want to get rid of it. Everything they are doing is showing me that all they want is to be stuck and suiting von der Leyen. Every time she says something, they jump. I am very sorry that this is happening. I got hundreds of emails and phone calls telling me to vote against this tonight. I will be doing just that. I always believed in our neutrality. This is only another chip out of it now. The Taoiseach is saying the reason for getting rid of it is so he can be involved in all the peacekeeping he wants to be. That is not right. We are a sovereign State and we can send our troops to any part of the world.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: We cannot. The law prevents us.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: We are a sovereign State and we should be able to do just that.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The triple lock is stopping us.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I will not interrupt the Minister of State, that is not the way that I was brought up.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: That is what we are trying to change.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: That is what the Government is saying but it is not right. It is the argument those opposite are using but it is just not right. Using this as an excuse to get rid of the triple lock is sacrilegious. Dev kept us out of the Second World War and kept our neutrality but the Deputies across from me will not do that. They would not have the guts to do something like that. It is very hurtful that the people of Ireland are being excluded from this massive decision. I cannot understand. I know there are backbenchers in Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael who are totally and absolutely against this. They just have to do what they are told. It is wrong to be forcing people who have their own long-held ideas. If the Government was fair about it, it would not be putting the Whip on those kind of fellas. If they will not give the people of Ireland a chance to decide, they should at least give one to the TDs around the country who fought hard to get elected and come here to do this job tonight, and not make them vote against their will. That is very wrong. It increases my idea that Deputies cannot represent the people the way they want to if they are not Independent because they will be forced to do what they do not want by the parties in power.

There is no difference in the world now between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Fine Gael wanted this all the time, at least the hierarchy of the party did. Fianna Fáil did not. Here we are tonight, they are both joining forces to get rid of the triple lock. They are chipping away at our neutrality. We see other things that are happening. The CAP budget is being reduced because we are putting more into defence. That is God's honest truth. I am thinking of the farmers around Ireland, the fellas in the hills and glens of Kerry who I know, who are only barely surviving. By accepting this, and they are not standing up for the people in that either, those opposite are hurting their own people. Hundreds of people have been on to me to vote against this tonight and I will be doing just that. I am glad to be here to do that. I am very sorry that this is happening. It should have been put to a referendum and the people given a chance.

Deputy Carol Nolan: Tá áthas orm an deis seo a fháil labhairt ar an mBille Cosanta (Leasú), 2026. I am very concerned over this Bill. I strongly oppose it and will be voting against it tonight. Many in this House have the same concerns. I have received so much correspondence from my constituents. Only yesterday I spoke to many constituents in Edenderry and other areas in north Offaly and this was the topic of conversation. They wanted me to vote against the Bill. There is massive concern among people in this country. It is absolutely shameful that they do not have a say in this. The people of this country should have a say in such an important national issue. People are strongly opposed and very concerned.

Like every Member of this House, I recognise that Europe faces significant security challenges. Conflict continues in multiple regions, as we know. Governments have a responsibility to assess those risks at all times and to ensure that their citizens are protected. Acknowledging those realities does not oblige us to abandon long-standing principles that have served this State well. In the past, Eamon de Valera was very strong on this principle of neutrality. It is shameful to see that our neutrality is being chipped away. Periods of uncertainty

are precisely when we should be more careful about dismantling the safeguards that were established for good reason and have served us well. What concerns me most of all is that the debate surrounding this legislation has become increasingly detached from a broader discussion about the direction in which Europe is moving. Across the European Union, defence spending is increasing at an unprecedented rate. EU member state defence expenditure is projected to rise from approximately €259 billion in 2021 to €454 billion in 2026, while the European Commission defence initiative seeks to mobilise more than €800 billion in additional defence-related investment. I am not against investment in our own Defence Forces, which of course should have been done, or military spending in general.

I wonder about the agenda behind it all because they are not putting as much effort into a CAP budget or ensuring food security. It seems that military spending is far more important for the Government's EU masters than issues like food security, which is concerning and disturbing. These developments may be supported by many, while others have reservations, but what cannot be denied is that they represent a profound shift in European priorities. In that context, it is entirely legitimate to ask difficult questions. Are we witnessing a proportionate response to genuine security concerns or are we gradually accepting the view that ever-increasing military expenditure is itself the measure of security? Where is our sovereignty? We should be able to make our own decisions on these matters. Irish sovereignty is being eroded all the time. These considerations have often been absent from the discussion. Ireland's policy of military neutrality emerged not from isolationism or indifference but from a determination to maintain an independent foreign policy and independent judgment on questions of war and peace. Neutrality has allowed Ireland to make a distinctive contribution internationally. It has strengthened our credibility in peacekeeping missions, humanitarian efforts and diplomatic initiatives. It has enabled Irish troops to serve with distinction across the world while maintaining broad public confidence at home. Most importantly, neutrality has ensured that decisions involving the deployment of Irish personnel overseas have been subject to particularly high thresholds of security and legitimacy.

This is where the triple lock comes in. The triple lock represented a deliberate recognition that the deployment of Irish troops overseas should carry three separate forms of approval - Government approval, Dáil approval and international legitimacy through the United Nations. No government argues that removing the UN element simply reflects changing geopolitical realities. I respectfully disagree with this. The difficulty is not that the Government wishes to respond to changing circumstances, but the difficulty is that it is proposing to remove an important restraint at precisely the moment when Europe is experiencing an unprecedented expansion of defence structures, defence budgets and military ambitions. That inevitably raises very serious questions, particularly when major defence firms have significantly expanded their lobbying operations in Brussels and as EU defence policy and procurement become increasingly central to the European project. To be absolutely clear, raising those concerns is not anti-European, it is not anti-defence and it is certainly not anti-military.

Ireland's neutrality has served our State and people well. It has protected our independence of judgment, it has enhanced our international standing and it remains one of the defining characteristics of Irish foreign policy. At a time when military spending is rising sharply across Europe, the appropriate response is not to weaken democratic safeguards around overseas deployments; it is to strengthen them and to maintain what has served us well.

Dismantling the triple lock will be a terrible mistake. I hope that Government TDs will not go along blindly with their Government leaders but, rather, will do the right thing by the Irish people and the people they serve and vote against it. For that reason and for the sake of preserving the principles that have guided Ireland's international engagement for decades, I cannot and will not be supporting this Bill. I urge all here to think seriously about this.

Minister for Defence (Deputy Helen McEntee): I thank all the Deputies who took part in this debate. It is important that we have an opportunity to discuss what is a really important matter for everybody in this country. I wish to touch on a number of points that have been raised, but also to restate a number of positions.

First, many Deputies have claimed this is being rushed. It is important to remind colleagues that this Bill was published in June following the pre-legislative scrutiny that took place last summer. We are now only on Second Stage of the debate. I have not heard that there is any Deputy who has had not an opportunity to speak on this. We will have many more opportunities to speak on it.

Second, I am not sure if I have been in a debate for some time where the Opposition was so sure and clear about what Fine Gael stood for, who we were, what Fianna Fáil stood for and what our ambitions, objectives and secret motives are behind all of this. Let me clarify for the Opposition on behalf of Fine Gael. Indeed, I think I speak for many in our Government. The objectives and intention behind this legislation are quite simple and clear. The legislation that we are proposing is to make sure that as a country - a sovereign independent country - that we and only we have the right to decide where we send our peacekeeping troops. Frankly, I am quite confused sitting here listening to the contributions. We have heard from many members of Sinn Féin, and we have just heard from Deputy Nolan, that we should make our own decisions and that we are an independent sovereign country. Where is our sovereignty? How do we keep our independence? How do we make sure that we have an independent foreign policy? I agree with all of this. However, they are talking out of both sides of their mouths because while they want us to have an independent foreign policy whereby we make our own decisions, members of Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, the Social Democrats, the Green Party, the Independent groupings and the technical groupings are all sitting here this evening and basically saying that China, the UK, France, the US and Russia - a country that is murdering citizens every single day in Ukraine and attacking members of the EU - should have a say in where we send our peacekeeping troops. That is what the Opposition parties are saying. They are saying that on one hand we should make our decisions and yet they are saying here this evening that they want those five permanent members of the UN Security Council to continue to have a say in where we send our troops.

This legislation will mean that we can continue our proud tradition of peacekeeping. There are UN mandated missions that are still there that we are part of, and we will continue to contribute to. There are missions that do not require the triple lock or a UN-mandated mission. There are maritime missions, missions on cybersecurity, training missions and missions around demining that do not require the triple lock but that we choose to be part of. We choose whether we take part in these missions. Due to the triple lock, there are missions that we cannot choose. As an independent country, we cannot decide to be part of them. That is the crux of what we are trying to achieve here.

I wish to point to some of the comments that were made about the UN and that this is the demise of Ireland's participation in and support for the UN. I suggest that the Deputies who have said that should actually visit the UN. They might spend a week, as I and many others in government have, at the UN General Assembly. They might talk to the General Secretary. They might talk to many of the 193 member countries, all of which see Ireland as a driving force in supporting the UN and the protection of basic human rights, human dignity, the international rules-based system and multilateralism. We will continue to drive forward in our pursuit to protect those who are the furthest behind and those who need our help the most. For us to do that, it is not just words that are needed; we have to be able to participate. We have to be able to continue to ensure that those words and values are translated through our Defence Forces peacekeeping missions. Quite frankly, that will not be possible for so many missions and in so many situations if the triple lock remains.

I wish to restate again that this legislation will ensure that our Defence Forces can continue to participate in UN-led and UN-organised missions. That will not change. We will have a choice, as we do now. It will also enable the Defence Forces to participate in missions organised or led by, for example, the OSCE, the EU and other regional arrangements. Any mission would only occur where it operates in a manner consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and international law. That is what we are proposing here this evening. That is our overall objective. There is not a single country in the world or a single member of the United Nations other than Ireland that requires a UN Security Council mandate to help us, tell us or assist us in where we send our troops. We are an independent sovereign country. That decision should be left to every single Member in this House, those of us who are democratically elected.

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Thomas Byrne): Taking hold of reality does not mean letting go of our ideals. In reforming the triple lock, we are doing so in a manner that remains fully consistent with our laws, our Constitution and the morals that found the laws in our Constitution. We will always act, and are required to act, in accordance with our obligations under international law. Reform of the triple lock meets our manifesto commitment from Fianna Fáil's point of view and our programme for Government commitments.

The question before us is a straightforward one, namely, do we believe decisions about where Irish peacekeepers serve should be made by Ireland, as Deputy Healy-Rae said, or should those decisions be made by others. I believe those decisions should be made by Ireland. There is a misconception in the Opposition at the heart of this debate. We currently require a UN mandate - Deputy Gibney was incorrect on this - to send even one member of the Defence Forces abroad for peacekeeping. The 12 figure quoted by many people refers to the threshold for Dáil approval. That is part of the reason we need reform.

The consequences of failing to reform the triple lock are not hypothetical. We were forced to leave, by law, Operation Irini in the Mediterranean. Everybody else stayed behind. Our soldiers, who had been proudly serving in the most humanitarian of ways, had to go home. That operation continues without the Irish. The triple lock meant we could not even come to the Dáil to ask if it was okay for us to keep our soldiers there. We simply did not have the option once the mandate expired in New York. How can we avoid that situation happening again? The Opposition does not have a clear answer to that. If we want our peacekeeping

tradition to continue, we must reform the triple lock, and if we value our sovereignty, we must exercise it. If we value the United Nations, we should continue to support it, to defend its charter and to work for reform, and that is why we have written that into the law.

On Ireland's military neutrality, there is no provision in the Bill that changes that. It provides for peacekeeping, peace enforcement and conflict prevention. I do not know whether Deputy Bennett misread the legislation or was deliberately putting misinformation into the House when she spoke of making our soldiers conflict participants. That was egregiously wrong and the record of the House should be corrected. It is scary to people out there and it is not true. It is not what is written in the legislation. If it was simply a mistake in that she saw "conflict prevention" and read "conflict participation", then she should say she made a mistake. Article 29 of our Constitution affirms Ireland's "devotion to the ideal of peace and friendly co-operation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality". That constitutional provision is still there. Many Opposition Members mentioned the Lisbon protocol and how important that was. I have news for them. The Lisbon protocol is attached to the Lisbon treaty, which is in our Constitution. We cannot change that in this House. We would have to have a referendum. The Lisbon protocol stays. It remains the law of the European Union and the law of Ireland.

Fianna Fáil is the party of Frank Aiken. When I went to the UN Security Council to advocate for the renewal of Operation Althea in 2022, the experience demonstrated to me why we needed reform. I had absolutely no certainty that day as to whether Russia or any other country would veto the renewal. Ireland would have been required to withdraw its contingent from that operation in Bosnia if Russia had decided on the day to veto. Diplomacy won on that occasion but it did not in the case of Operation Irini and it certainly did not in the case of UNIFIL when the United States prevented the continuation of that mission. I contested the election as a Fianna Fáil candidate with a manifesto that promised sensible reform of the triple lock while continuing to protect our military neutrality. Following the mandate we received at that election, I am proud to serve as a Minister of State at the Department of Defence with a programme for Government that includes reform of the triple lock. By reforming the triple lock Ireland ensures we can continue to stand with other nations in the pursuit of peace abroad while ensuring sovereignty over our own peacekeeping decisions. We have no time to lose. I look forward to engaging with Members further in this House and Seanad Éireann. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Conor Sheehan): In accordance with Standing Order 85(2), the division is postponed until the weekly division time today, Wednesday, 21 October 2026.

Teachtaireacht ón Seanad - Message from Seanad

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Conor Sheehan): Seanad Éireann has passed the Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) (Amendment) Bill 2026, without amendment.

European Regulations and Directives: Motions

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): 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 application of the following measure:

Regulation (EU) 2025/2082 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 October 2025 amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1727 as regards the extension of the timeframe for the establishment of the Eurojust case management system,

a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 21st September, 2026.

I ask the House to approve Ireland's participation in three important EU justice and security measures. I am seeking that we approve them under Article 4 of Protocol No. 21 on the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The three European measures I am seeking the House's permission to opt in to are: a directive from 2017, No. 541 on combating terrorism; a regulation from 2023, No. 2131 on digital information exchange in terrorism cases; and a regulation from 2025, No. 2082 concerning the Eurojust case management system. These motions are brought pursuant to Article 29.4.7° of Bunreacht na hÉireann which requires the approval of both Houses of the Oireachtas before Ireland may exercise its discretion under Article 4, Protocol No. 21 to participate in justice and home affairs measures after their adoption.

The first measure, the 2017 counterterrorism directive, is the European Union's principal legislative instrument in the fight against terrorism. It establishes common rules on terrorist offences and strengthens protections for victims of terrorism. While it re-articulated much of the existing EU counterterrorism framework, in which Ireland already participates, it also introduced new offences relating to receiving training for terrorism, travelling for terrorism and organising or facilitating such travel. It was developed in response to the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters travelling to and from conflict zones. The remaining necessary domestic legislation to give effect to it has been put in place through the Criminal Justice Terrorist Offences (Amendment) Act 2026, enabling Ireland to proceed with participation in the directive.

The second measure, the 2023 Eurojust regulation, relates to Eurojust, the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, and strengthens judicial co-operation across Europe in terrorism cases. It provides a stronger legal basis for Eurojust's counterterrorism register and introduces a new digital case management system. These are designed to improve information-sharing and enable links between terrorism cases across member states to be identified more effectively.

The third measure is the 2025 regulation. It is a technical amendment extending the timeline for the transition to the new Eurojust case management system. It ensures continuity while technical development of the system is completed. Ireland is currently the only EU member state not participating in the 2023 regulation. The new Eurojust case management system is

expected to become operational in December 2026 and Ireland's continued participation in Eurojust could be jeopardised if we remain outside this new framework. Such an outcome would have significant implications for our ability to co-operate with European partners in combating serious cross-border crime and terrorism.

Approval of these motions does not itself complete the opt-in process. Rather, it authorises the Government to notify the European Commission and the Council of the European Union of Ireland's intention to participate under Article 4 of Protocol No. 21. The Commission will then assess Ireland's request and determine the conditions and date from which participation will take effect. These measures will strengthen Ireland's security, enable full European counterterrorism co-operation, support effective collaboration with our EU partners and protect Ireland's position within Eurojust. I commend the motions to the House and ask Members to support their adoption.

Deputy Mark Ward: The manner in which these motions are being brought before the House is wholly unsatisfactory. Once again Members have been given just two days' notice to consider measures arising from significant EU instruments. Once again, we are told they must be dealt with as a matter of urgency. This approach does little to inspire public confidence. It helps explain why many people feel disconnected from the decision-making at European level. Measures with implications for our criminal justice system, our sovereignty and our relationship with the EU institutions deserve proper scrutiny. Instead, the Oireachtas is repeatedly presented with complex proposals and asked to wave them through. Ireland occupies a unique position in this area. Unlike most other EU member states, Ireland secured the right under Protocol No. 21 during the Lisbon treaty negotiations to choose whether to participate in measures relating to justice and home affairs.

That safeguard was presented to the Irish people as an important protection of national sovereignty. It gave Ireland the ability to decide, on a case-by-case basis, whether participation was in our interests. As Sinn Féin has pointed out on numerous occasions, however, the Government is increasingly choosing to opt in to measures where an opt-out exists. That raises legitimate questions about whether the spirit of the guarantee provided to Irish voters is being respected.

The measures before us relate to a 2017 directive on combating terrorism and two subsequent regulations concerning the operation of Eurojust, the EU agency responsible for co-ordinating cross-border criminal investigations and prosecutions. The 2017 directive strengthened counterterrorism laws by creating offences relating to terrorist training and travel for terrorism purposes. It also expanded the concept of public provocation to commit terrorism and clarified that in certain circumstances the glorification of terrorism could constitute a criminal offence. Indeed, the Government already legislated to give effect to this directive through the Criminal Justice (Amendment) Act 2026. During consideration of that legislation, Sinn Féin opposed the provisions relating to the criminalisation of public provocation and glorification. We did so because of concerns about how such provisions may be interpreted and applied, including to undermine political expression.

The two Eurojust regulations before us today strengthen information-sharing, establish a new digital case-management system, expand the counterterrorism register and deepen co-operation between national authorities. However, it would be wrong to suggest that there are

no sovereignty implications. By opting in to these measures, Ireland becomes further integrated into an EU-wide framework for counterterrorism and judicial co-operation. The 2017 directive requires the State to maintain criminal offences defined at EU level. The 2023 regulation increases obligations to share information through Eurojust structures. It expands the role of EU institutions in the co-ordination of investigations and requires greater participation in shared systems and databases. While prosecutions remain a matter for national authorities and while Eurojust itself does not prosecute cases, these measures undoubtedly increase interdependence between member states and EU agencies in the area of criminal justice.

There is also a broader point. Across Europe, there are different approaches to questions of political expression, national movements and the definition of terrorism. Different states can take very different views on where legitimate political advocacy ends and unlawful support for terrorism begins. Given that the 2017 directive deals with public provocation and the glorification of terrorism, it is entirely reasonable to ask how such provisions might be interpreted in different jurisdictions and what safeguards exist to ensure that legitimate political expression is protected. These are important questions; they deserve debate, scrutiny and more than a rushed process justified on the basis that urgency leaves us with no alternative.

To be clear: my concern is not with the objective of combating terrorism or facilitating international co-operation. My concern is with a process that repeatedly asks the Oireachtas to consider significant EU measures at short notice without the level of scrutiny such matters warrant.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: As the Minister will know from my colleague, Sinn Féin supports effective international co-operation to tackle terrorism and serious crime. However, measures with implications for our justice system and sovereignty must receive proper scrutiny from the Oireachtas. This is never more important than now.

Co-operation between EU member states is particularly important when it comes to organised crime. We know drug gangs do not respect borders. Those directing the drugs trade, orchestrating intimidation and ordering violence in communities across Ireland may be based, and oftentimes are based, in other EU member states. We need to see effective intelligence-sharing between police forces and judicial authorities and no EU member state should be a safe haven for those who direct criminal activity in Ireland from abroad.

We must target those at the top of these organisations, the people who direct, oversee and profit from this criminality. It is not enough to arrest those carrying out orders on the ground while the people giving those orders remain beyond reach, oftentimes in European Union member states. That means working together to track suspects, share evidence, pursue prosecutions and seize criminal assets. We must strip these gangs of the money and resources that allow them to operate and ensure those responsible can be brought to justice, regardless of where they are based.

Drug-related intimidation and violence are devastating families and communities across Ireland. Our response must recognise that these criminal networks operate internationally and tackling them requires cross-border action. European co-operation must deliver practical results, better intelligence, stronger investigations and accountability for those who direct and profit from organised crime.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I begin by making it clear that the Social Democrats support European co-operation when it comes to tackling terrorism. We support the objectives of these measures. We support countries working together, sharing information and ensuring that those who engage in terrorist activity can be investigated and prosecuted wherever they may be. It need not even have been said. That is why we are going to support the first two motions relating to Eurojust.

However, we will not be supporting the third motion on the EU counterterrorism directive. I will explain why. When the domestic legislation underpinning our participation in the directive came before the Oireachtas previously, we had an opportunity to strengthen it and ensure the legislation contained the strongest possible protections for fundamental rights, including the right to protest and the freedom of political expression. Important amendments were put forward but were not approved or accepted. Ultimately, we voted against that legislation.

I want to be very clear that this is not about opposing measures to tackle terrorism. It is about ensuring that legislation designed to protect people from terrorism can never be used to criminalise people for exercising their democratic right. We have to be extraordinarily careful about powers we give to the State, particularly when it comes to something as fundamental as a right to protest. I do not believe individual members of this Government are fundamentally opposed to free speech or anything of the like. I do not believe they are sitting around a Cabinet table looking for ways to criminalise peaceful protest. I am grateful we live in a country where people can take to the streets every single week to express their horror at atrocities or their opposition to legislation or the Government, but legislation cannot simply rely on the goodwill of the people who happen to be in government on that day. We cannot legislate on the assumption that every future Government will exercise these powers in the same way.

If you look at the previous Dáil session, we have good reason to be gravely concerned about how quickly political commitments have changed when it comes to the triple lock. For decades, various Governments told the people of Ireland that the triple lock was a fundamental protection of Irish neutrality. It was used to pass two referendums. It was an essential safeguard and then it was taken away by a forced vote.

I am told we should trust the assurances given today about how counterterrorism legislation will be used tomorrow. I think we are entitled to ask some serious questions because we have seen how quickly these assurances can change. We do not even have to imagine what it might look like when it comes to the right to protest; we only have to look across the sea to our nearest neighbours. We are all still in disbelief at the decision to proscribe Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation in the United Kingdom. We all genuinely struggle to comprehend how we arrived at a point where elderly women holding placards expressing support for the Palestinian cause are being led away in handcuffs by police officers. We have all seen those images. People who spent their lives participating in peaceful democratic protests are finding themselves arrested under terrorism legislation. We all should not only be disturbed by that but cautious as we move to advance our own legislation that does not seek to provide the appropriate safeguards.

We will be voting against option 3 for the reasons outlined. There were opportunities to present safeguards and I do not think those opportunities were met. We will be opposing the third option based on the lack of assurances given.

Deputy Alan Kelly: Protocol 21 works case by case. Each measure needs to be opted in in its own right and approved by both Houses under Article 29.4.7°. Each motion is a specific EU measure. We will support these but as I have said in front of this House many times before, the way in which these are brought forward leaves a lot to be desired. The amount of time given to them, the haphazard way in which they are brought forward, the level of notice given and the way in which the Minister's Department brings them forward at the last minute leaves a lot to be desired. It is not the first time I have said this.

I know it is a big Department and the Minister has taken on a lot more as well, to be fair, but it is a real issue.

We did not opt in to Directive (EU) 2017/541 on combating terrorism when it was adopted in 2017. However, the implementing Criminal Justice (Terrorist Offences) (Amendment) Act 2026 was signed in July. It creates the offences of travelling for terrorism, facilitating such travel and receiving terrorist training. The Department's position has been that the legislation must be in place before the Commission confirms participation. Regulation (EU) 2023/2131 amends the Eurojust regulation to require structured, secure digital sharing of terrorism case information in Eurojust. The second Eurojust amendment, also in place, extended the timeframe for establishing the Eurojust case management system. Ireland is already in Eurojust. The first and second motions keep us aligned with amendments to it, so that we do not risk falling out of its newer systems.

I have some questions, which the Minister may address in reply. When will the 2026 Act I referenced earlier be fully commenced? Which authority will be Ireland's Eurojust national correspondent for terrorism, and what data protection safeguards will apply to the new information flows that will come as a result of this? How will the directive's victim support obligations be met?

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I thank all colleagues for their contributions, to which I have listened closely. A number of issues were raised by Deputy Ward, and Deputy Kelly also raised concerns about the speed with which these motions have come before the House. I will try in future to see if there is a mechanism whereby I will be able to provide more time to colleagues to deal with such opt-ins. That is certainly the case when it comes to Article 3 opt-ins, as there is time pressure in respect of them and, as Deputy Kelly outlined, there is time pressure in respect of one of the opt-ins this evening as well. Ultimately, however, these are political decisions to be made. I am conscious that there is a lot on the political agenda but the three proposals this evening are relatively straightforward in what they seek to do, namely, to assist us in combating terrorism on a united basis across the European Union and to ensure we continue our alignment and co-operation with Eurojust.

Deputy Ward said the opt-out is automatic but we have achieved that already in what was contained in Protocol 21. We managed to achieve that in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union so that if a justice and home affairs measure is agreed by the European Union,

we automatically do not participate in it. There is that automatic opt-out. We decided that. The Irish people voted for it. At the same time, we are entitled to consider and decide whether we want to opt in to these measures. There are some measures that we do not opt into. One was brought to my attention by officials last week and I decided that we would not opt in to it. It is appropriate for us to opt into these provisions because they are important for our continuing alignment and co-operation with Eurojust and to ensure that we have a co-ordinated response across the European Union in respect of terrorism.

Deputies Ward and Gannon mentioned concerns about the spread and ambit of terrorism legislation. I, too, share the concerns expressed about the legislation that exists at present in the UK - the Terrorism Act. That is extraordinarily broad legislation. Under that legislation, it is a criminal offence for people to wear an emblem suggestive that they are supportive of a proscribed organisation. We discussed this when the Criminal Justice (Terrorist Offences) (Amendment) Act 2026 was going through this House. I specifically ensured the legislation would not replicate or imitate the legislation enacted in the UK, which I believe goes too far. The legislation that was enacted in Ireland, the Criminal Justice (Terrorist Offences) (Amendment) Act 2026, does not, in my opinion, undermine political expression or free speech.

On what Deputy Ward said about sovereignty being impacted, we are making the decision here, in the elected House of the Irish people, to share sovereignty in a number of areas. That is a sovereign decision being made by the Irish people.

Deputy McGuinness spoke about how we need international co-operation. That is apparent from the horrific criminal events we have seen recently, not just in Ireland but in other countries. Crime is now international. It does not recognise borders. If we want to get suspects back from other EU countries to ensure they face the law here, we need to have co-operation. That is why it is important that we align ourselves on co-operation across the EU.

I note what Deputy Gannon said about the Social Democrats being supportive of two of the three motions but he made the point that legislation cannot be used to criticise or to restrict people expressing their right to protest. Nobody is doing this, and anything that we opt into this evening will not have an impact in respect of that.

Deputy Kelly was correct when he said that Protocol 21 issues should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. As I said at the outset, there will always be a decision as to whether a party wishes to support the opt-in. Deputy Kelly asked me when the Criminal Justice (Terrorist Offences) (Amendment) Act 2026 will be commenced. I am anxious to commence it promptly but I cannot give the Deputy a specific date yet. I will engage with him on it.

Another question Deputy Kelly asked was about who has access to operational personal data processed by Eurojust and what the data protection measures are. Access to such information is limited to national members, their deputies and assistants, seconded national experts and members of the national co-ordination system under Article 34 of the 2018 Eurojust regulation. On Eurojust, it is important to emphasise that it is an important body for the purpose of co-operation across the European Union on criminal justice.

Question put and agreed to.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): 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 application of the following measure:

Regulation (EU) 2023/2131 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 October 2023 amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1727 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Decision 2005/671/JHA, as regards digital information exchange in terrorism cases,

a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 21st September, 2026.

Question put and agreed to.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): 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 application of the following measure:

Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA,

a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 21st September, 2026.

Question put and agreed to.

8 o'clock

Home Heating Oil Costs: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Pearse Doherty on Tuesday, 13 October 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

— approximately 700,000 households across the State depend on home heating oil to keep their homes warm, with many families facing unprecedented financial pressure as winter approaches; and

— the cost of filling a home heating oil tank has increased by more than €700 since the beginning of 2026;

further notes that:

— in the hours after the Budget was announced, wholesale home heating oil prices increased by €100 for a fill, with a further increase projected;

— households now face bills of over €1,600 on a 1,000-litre fill of home heating oil;

— despite these extraordinary increases, Budget 2027 delivered a reduction of just €43 on a 1,000-litre fill of home heating oil;

— increases over recent days demonstrate how quickly the Government's inadequate €43 reduction has been wiped out;

— Sinn Féin has consistently called for the removal of carbon tax from home heating oil, including through legislation brought before the Dáil, to deliver immediate and meaningful reductions in household heating costs;

— Budget 2027 also failed to introduce any further reduction in petrol and diesel prices, leaving workers and families facing continued high transport costs, and changes in the fuel allowance have actually left recipients worse off; and

— despite the strength of the State's finances, the Government has failed to deliver sufficient immediate relief to households struggling to afford the basic necessity of heating their homes; and

calls on the Government to immediately remove all carbon tax from home heating oil, delivering a meaningful reduction in costs for the approximately 700,000 households dependent on it.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

"recognises:

— that the Government remains deeply concerned about the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and Gulf, and recognises that de-escalation will have the single greatest impact on reducing prices on home heating oil and other oil-based fuel products;

— that the Government continues to monitor increased energy prices that are felt across Europe and the globe;

— that the Government fully understands the pressures on households that have arisen due to rising home heating costs, and has continuously acted to allay these pressures;

— successive Budgets have provided targeted support to help households with cost-of-living pressures, and re-affirms that energy affordability is a priority for the Government;

— that the Government remains committed to decarbonising our society, increasing investment in renewable energy sources and recycling carbon tax revenues to protect those most vulnerable to fuel poverty through targeted welfare interventions;

— Ireland's obligations in respect of European Union (EU) legislation pertaining to fossil fuel taxation, and that abolition of the carbon tax may result in Ireland losing a derogation under European law;

— that the Government continues to use the funding from carbon tax to help farmers, businesses and households with increased energy prices;

— that the Government continues to monitor the economic impacts carefully, having already taken actions to mitigate energy increases, and provide certainty for families and businesses against the backdrop of global instability; and

— that the Government continues to invest in retrofitting, boiler scrappage, wind energy and many other measures to help alleviate costs in the medium-term;

notes that:

— the Government has delivered one of the largest support packages in the EU per head capita, amounting to over €1.7 billion in supports from March 2026 to June 2027, to assist households and businesses;

— excise reductions have been extended until February 2027, retaining a 30 cent reduction in diesel and 25 cent reduction in petrol;

— Budget 2026 and 2027 have expanded fuel allowance payments to 50,000 more households, and increased the weekly payment;

— the trajectory of the carbon tax has been altered to ease pressure on households, with the rate on home heating oil and gas reduced and paused for the lifetime of the Government; and

— a series of new schemes have been developed to help people make the transition away from fossil fuels; and

confirms that the Government will continue to:

— keep the situation under review in the time ahead; and

— respond in a way that protects those most vulnerable to fuel poverty.".

- (Minister of State at the Department of Finance)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding home heating oil costs. On Tuesday, 13 October 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the motion be made", a division was claimed and, in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 70; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Boland, Grace.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Brian.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brennan, Shay.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brophy, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	

Browne, James.	Collins, Michael.	
Burke, Colm.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butler, Mary.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butterly, Paula.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Cullinane, David.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cummins, Jen.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Devine, Máire.	
Calleary, Dara.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Canney, Seán.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Chambers, Jack.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Collins, Niall.	Gannon, Gary.	
Connolly, John.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Currie, Emer.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Daly, Martin.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Martin.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawless, Paul.	
Foley, Norma.	Lawlor, George.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Grealish, Noel.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Heydon, Martin.	Murphy, Paul.	
Higgins, Emer.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Keogh, Keira.	Nash, Ged.	
Kyne, Seán.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lahart, John.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lowry, Michael.	Nolan, Carol.	
Martin, Micheál.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	

Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Murphy, Michael.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Neville, Joe.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Smith, Duncan.	
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.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Aengus Ó Snodaigh.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 70; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Boland, Grace.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Brian.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brennan, Shay.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brophy, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Browne, James.	Collins, Michael.	
Burke, Colm.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butler, Mary.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butterly, Paula.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Cullinane, David.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cummins, Jen.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Devine, Máire.	

Calleary, Dara.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Canney, Seán.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Chambers, Jack.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Collins, Niall.	Gannon, Gary.	
Connolly, John.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Currie, Emer.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Daly, Martin.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Martin.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawless, Paul.	
Foley, Norma.	Lawlor, George.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Grealish, Noel.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Heydon, Martin.	Murphy, Paul.	
Higgins, Emer.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Keogh, Keira.	Nash, Ged.	
Kyne, Seán.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lahart, John.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lowry, Michael.	Nolan, Carol.	
Martin, Micheál.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Murphy, Michael.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Neville, Joe.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Sherlock, Marie.	

O'Callaghan, Jim.	Smith, Duncan.	
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.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Aengus Ó Snodaigh.

Question declared carried.

Public Sector Pay: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Ged Nash on Thursday, 15 October 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

— the Government allowed the Public Sector Pay agreement to expire in June 2026, leaving over 400,000 workers with no collective pay agreement for the first time since 2010;

— since then, across the public service, trade unions have balloted their members, and there has been overwhelming support in favour of taking industrial action; and

— no provision was made in Budget 2027 for pay rises in the remainder of 2026, while inflation has reached 4.1 per cent;

agrees that it is economically and fiscally reckless for the Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation to have allowed a situation to develop where there is no pay agreement that ensures certainty for both workers and the State;

recalls that:

— the last time there was a nationwide public service strike was in 2009, under a Fianna Fáil Government;

— the Government has repeatedly given in to the demands of narrow sectoral interests and lobbyists through the last two Budgets, and in response to fuel protests; and

— Budget 2026 failed to index PAYE tax rates, bands and credits, and the changes this year still leave workers cumulatively behind;

further recalls that:

— as part of the last pay agreement, there was provision for the first phase of a 1 per cent local bargaining increase from 1st September, 2025, to be followed by 2 per cent in the next successor agreement;

— there have been significant delays in the implementation of these agreed increases, leading to growing frustration and anger in affected sectors; and

— there have also been similar delays in the implementation of previous agreed commitments and Labour Court recommendations, and this has damaged trust;

recognises that talks on a new agreement must clearly prioritise pay from the outset, and the Government has not demonstrated a credible approach that properly addresses the growing cost-of-living pressures facing public sector workers;

regrets that:

— the Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation has resorted to lecturing public sector workers in his Budget Day speech, and blaming trade unions for his failure to meaningfully engage on future pay; and

— comments by the Taoiseach have further inflamed the dispute; and

calls on the Government to:

— drop their arbitrary preconditions, and commit to engaging, in good faith, with the trade unions representing public sector workers; and

— commit that future pay increases will, at a minimum, protect the pay of public sector workers against inflation.

The following amendment No. 1 was moved by the Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation:

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

"recognises that:

— public servants make a vital contribution to the delivery of public services across the State; and

— the best means of securing improvements in pay and conditions is through negotiation and agreement, thereby avoiding disruption to public services and to those who rely on them;

notes that:

— the Government remains fully committed to the established collective bargaining framework for the public service;

— the Public Service Agreement 2024-2026 delivered cumulative pay improvements of 9.6 per cent, exceeding cumulative inflation of 6.6 per cent over the period;

— successive public service agreements have provided a stable framework for industrial peace, pay improvements, and public service reform;

— the Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, and his officials, have consistently stated their willingness to commence negotiations on a successor agreement, and have made clear that all issues raised by unions and staff associations can be discussed within that process;

— extensive efforts have been made by the Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, and his officials, to facilitate the commencement of negotiations;

— the Government remains committed to the full implementation of the agreed local bargaining framework, with engagement between the parties identifying pathways to resolve a range of local bargaining issues, through established industrial relations mechanisms at local level;

— Budget 2027 provides €1.2 billion to support a successor public service pay agreement; and

— Budget 2027 also includes a range of measures to support household incomes and living standards;

regrets that the planned strike action on Wednesday, 14th October, will cause great disruption to the public, especially the most vulnerable in our society, and also result in an avoidable loss of income for public servants; and

calls for:

— all strike action to be postponed and for all parties to engage in immediate and intensive discussions under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission, and that pay can be considered as a priority alongside other matters within these discussions; and

— all sides to work towards the early conclusion of a fair, sustainable and affordable successor public service agreement.".

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1 to amendment No. 1:

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

":

— people are suffering because of the cost-of-living crisis, as prices of goods and services have increased by 22 per cent over the past five years, and wage increases have fallen behind inflation;

— public sector unions estimate that the gap between inflation and the pay of the average public servant over the past five years is at least 5 per cent;

— the pressure on living standards has continued into 2026, with public servants receiving increases amounting to an average pay increase of around 1.5 per cent across the year, while annual average inflation has accelerated to 4.1 per cent;

— the public sector pay agreement expired in June, leaving over 400,000 workers with no collective pay agreement;

— since then, public sector trade unions have balloted their members, and there has been overwhelming support in favour of taking industrial action;

— the unions have said that if the Government would agree to a structured approach to dealing with pay, then the unions can move on to negotiate on other issues like AI, remote working and outsourcing of services; and

— the Government has not given this entirely reasonable commitment, and instead has created deliberate confusion by claiming that unions have been unwilling to engage in pay negotiations;

notes that a multi-millionaire' tax on the wealthiest 1 per cent can raise the additional revenue required to meet the cost of pay increases for public sector workers; and

calls on the Government to:

— engage in pay talks with public sector trade unions in good faith, without pre-condition, and with pay dealt with up front; and

— agree a pay increase that restores the real value of wages eroded by inflation in recent years, provides for protection against ongoing inflation, and further provides a real increase in public sector workers' wages.".

- (Deputy Paul Murphy)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the People Before Profit-Solidarity amendment to the Government amendment to the motion regarding public sector pay. On Thursday, 15 October 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the amendment be made", a division was claimed and, in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment to amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 65; Níl, 82; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Bacik, Ivana.	Aird, William.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Boland, Grace.	
Brady, John.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brennan, Brian.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brennan, Shay.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Brophy, Colm.	

Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Browne, James.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Burke, Colm.	
Cronin, Réada.	Butler, Mary.	
Crowe, Seán.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cullinane, David.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Cummins, Jen.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Devine, Máire.	Cahill, Michael.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Calleary, Dara.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Canney, Seán.	
Ennis, Daniel.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Chambers, Jack.	
Gannon, Gary.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Clendennen, John.	
Gould, Thomas.	Collins, Michael.	
Graves, Ann.	Collins, Niall.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Connolly, John.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Cooney, Joe.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Healy, Seamus.	Cummins, John.	
Hearne, Rory.	Currie, Emer.	
Kelly, Alan.	Daly, Martin.	
Kenny, Martin.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Lawlor, George.	Dillon, Alan.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Dolan, Albert.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Feighan, Frankie.	
McGrath, Mattie.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Fleming, Sean.	
Murphy, Paul.	Foley, Norma.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Nash, Ged.	Geoghegan, James.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Grealish, Noel.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Harkin, Marian.	
Nolan, Carol.	Heydon, Martin.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Higgins, Emer.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	Keogh, Keira.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	Kyne, Seán.	
O'Hara, Louis.	Lahart, John.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	Lowry, Michael.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	Martin, Micheál.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Maxwell, David.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	McCarthy, Noel.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	McCormack, Tony.	
Quaide, Liam.	McEntee, Helen.	

Quinlivan, Maurice.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Rice, Pádraig.	McGreehan, Erin.	
Sheehan, Conor.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
Sherlock, Marie.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Smith, Duncan.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Stanley, Brian.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Wall, Mark.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Ward, Charles.	Murphy, Michael.	
Ward, Mark.	Neville, Joe.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
	O'Connell, Maeve.	
	O'Connor, James.	
	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
	O'Flynn, Ken.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Ward, Barry.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Ruth Coppinger and Paul Murphy; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment to amendment declared lost.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 70; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Boland, Grace.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Brian.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brennan, Shay.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brophy, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Browne, James.	Collins, Michael.	
Burke, Colm.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butler, Mary.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butterly, Paula.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Crowe, Seán.	

Byrne, Thomas.	Cullinane, David.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cummins, Jen.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Devine, Máire.	
Calleary, Dara.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Canney, Seán.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Chambers, Jack.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Collins, Niall.	Gannon, Gary.	
Connolly, John.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Currie, Emer.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Daly, Martin.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Martin.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawless, Paul.	
Foley, Norma.	Lawlor, George.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Grealish, Noel.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Heydon, Martin.	Murphy, Paul.	
Higgins, Emer.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Keogh, Keira.	Nash, Ged.	
Kyne, Seán.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lahart, John.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lowry, Michael.	Nolan, Carol.	
Martin, Micheál.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	

Murphy, Michael.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Neville, Joe.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Smith, Duncan.	
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.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Duncan Smith and Ged Nash.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 71; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Boland, Grace.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Brian.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brennan, Shay.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brophy, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Browne, James.	Collins, Michael.	
Burke, Colm.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butler, Mary.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butterly, Paula.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Cullinane, David.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cummins, Jen.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Devine, Máire.	
Calleary, Dara.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Canney, Seán.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Chambers, Jack.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Farrell, Mairéad.	

Clendennen, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Collins, Niall.	Gannon, Gary.	
Connolly, John.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Currie, Emer.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Daly, Martin.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Martin.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawless, Paul.	
Foley, Norma.	Lawlor, George.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Geoghegan, James.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Grealish, Noel.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Heydon, Martin.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Higgins, Emer.	Murphy, Paul.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Kyne, Seán.	Nash, Ged.	
Lahart, John.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lowry, Michael.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Martin, Micheál.	Nolan, Carol.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murphy, Michael.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Neville, Joe.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Connor, James.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Ward, Charles.	

O'Sullivan, Christopher.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Duncan Smith and Ged Nash.

Question declared carried.

Children's Health (Ospidéal Náisiúnta Kathleen Lynn do Leanaí) (Amendment) Bill 2025: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to Second Stage of the Children's Health (Ospidéal Náisiúnta Kathleen Lynn do Leanaí) (Amendment) Bill 2025, taken on 15 October 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:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 71; Níl, 79; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Bacik, Ivana.	Aird, William.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Boland, Grace.	
Brady, John.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brennan, Brian.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brennan, Shay.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Brophy, Colm.	
Collins, Michael.	Browne, James.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Burke, Colm.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Butler, Mary.	
Cronin, Réada.	Butterly, Paula.	
Crowe, Seán.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Cullinane, David.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Cummins, Jen.	Cahill, Michael.	
Devine, Máire.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Calleary, Dara.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Canney, Seán.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Ennis, Daniel.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Chambers, Jack.	

Farrell, Mairéad.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Clendennen, John.	
Gannon, Gary.	Collins, Niall.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Connolly, John.	
Gould, Thomas.	Cooney, Joe.	
Graves, Ann.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Cummins, John.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Currie, Emer.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Daly, Martin.	
Healy, Seamus.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Hearne, Rory.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Kelly, Alan.	Dillon, Alan.	
Kenny, Martin.	Dolan, Albert.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Lawless, Paul.	Fleming, Sean.	
Lawlor, George.	Foley, Norma.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
McDonald, Mary Lou.	Geoghegan, James.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Grealish, Noel.	
McGrath, Mattie.	Harkin, Marian.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Heydon, Martin.	
Murphy, Paul.	Higgins, Emer.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Keogh, Keira.	
Nash, Ged.	Kyne, Seán.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Lahart, John.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Lowry, Michael.	
Nolan, Carol.	Martin, Micheál.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Maxwell, David.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	McCarthy, Noel.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Hara, Louis.	McCormack, Tony.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	McEntee, Helen.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	McGreehan, Erin.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Quaide, Liam.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Murphy, Michael.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Neville, Joe.	
Sheehan, Conor.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Sherlock, Marie.	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
Smith, Duncan.	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.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Ward, Barry.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Aengus Ó Snodaigh; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Question declared lost.

Non-Binary and Intersex Recognition Bill 2026: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to Second Stage of the Non-Binary and Intersex Recognition Bill 2026, taken today, 21 October 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:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 63; Níl, 87; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Bacik, Ivana.	Aird, William.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Boland, Grace.	
Brady, John.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brennan, Brian.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brennan, Shay.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Brophy, Colm.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Browne, James.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Burke, Colm.	
Cronin, Réada.	Butler, Mary.	
Crowe, Seán.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cullinane, David.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Cummins, Jen.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Devine, Máire.	Cahill, Michael.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Calleary, Dara.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Canney, Seán.	
Ennis, Daniel.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	

Farrell, Mairéad.	Chambers, Jack.	
Gannon, Gary.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Clendennen, John.	
Gould, Thomas.	Collins, Michael.	
Graves, Ann.	Collins, Niall.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Connolly, John.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Cooney, Joe.	
Healy, Seamus.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Hearne, Rory.	Cummins, John.	
Kelly, Alan.	Currie, Emer.	
Kenny, Martin.	Daly, Martin.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Lawlor, George.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Dillon, Alan.	
McDonald, Mary Lou.	Dolan, Albert.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Feighan, Frankie.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Murphy, Paul.	Fleming, Sean.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Foley, Norma.	
Nash, Ged.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Geoghegan, James.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Grealish, Noel.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Harkin, Marian.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	Heydon, Martin.	
O'Hara, Louis.	Higgins, Emer.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	Keogh, Keira.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	Kyne, Seán.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Lahart, John.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	Lawless, Paul.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Lowry, Michael.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Martin, Micheál.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Maxwell, David.	
Quaide, Liam.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	McCarthy, Noel.	
Rice, Pádraig.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
Sheehan, Conor.	McCormack, Tony.	
Sherlock, Marie.	McEntee, Helen.	
Smith, Duncan.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Stanley, Brian.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Wall, Mark.	McGreehan, Erin.	
Ward, Charles.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
Ward, Mark.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	Moynihan, Michael.	
	Moynihan, Shane.	
	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
	Murphy, Michael.	
	Neville, Joe.	

	Nolan, Carol.	
	O'Brien, Darragh.	
	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
	O'Connell, Maeve.	
	O'Connor, James.	
	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
	O'Flynn, Ken.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Tóibín, Peadar.	
	Ward, Barry.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Ruth Coppinger and Paul Murphy; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Question declared lost.

Defence (Amendment) Bill 2026: Second Stage (Resumed)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to Second Stage of the Defence (Amendment) Bill 2026, taken today, 21 October 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:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 71; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Boland, Grace.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Brian.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brennan, Shay.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brophy, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Browne, James.	Collins, Michael.	
Burke, Colm.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butler, Mary.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butterly, Paula.	Cronin, Réada.	

Byrne, Malcolm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Cullinane, David.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cummins, Jen.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Devine, Máire.	
Calleary, Dara.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Canney, Seán.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Chambers, Jack.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Collins, Niall.	Gannon, Gary.	
Connolly, John.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Currie, Emer.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Daly, Martin.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Martin.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawless, Paul.	
Foley, Norma.	Lawlor, George.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Geoghegan, James.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Grealish, Noel.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Heydon, Martin.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Higgins, Emer.	Murphy, Paul.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Kyne, Seán.	Nash, Ged.	
Lahart, John.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lowry, Michael.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Martin, Micheál.	Nolan, Carol.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	

Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murphy, Michael.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Neville, Joe.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Connor, James.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire and Danny Healy-Rae.

Question declared carried.

Defence (Amendment) Bill 2026: Referral to Select Committee

Minister for Defence (Deputy Helen McEntee): I move:

That the Bill be referred to the Committee on Defence and National Security pursuant to Standing Orders 103(2)(*b*) and 188(1).

Question put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 71; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Boland, Grace.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Brian.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brennan, Shay.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brophy, Colm.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Browne, James.	Collins, Michael.	
Burke, Colm.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butler, Mary.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butterly, Paula.	Cronin, Réada.	

Byrne, Malcolm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Cullinane, David.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cummins, Jen.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Devine, Máire.	
Calleary, Dara.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Canney, Seán.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Chambers, Jack.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Collins, Niall.	Gannon, Gary.	
Connolly, John.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Currie, Emer.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Daly, Martin.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Martin.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawless, Paul.	
Foley, Norma.	Lawlor, George.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Geoghegan, James.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Grealish, Noel.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Heydon, Martin.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Higgins, Emer.	Murphy, Paul.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Kyne, Seán.	Nash, Ged.	
Lahart, John.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lowry, Michael.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Martin, Micheál.	Nolan, Carol.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	

Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murphy, Michael.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Neville, Joe.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Connor, James.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire and Danny Healy-Rae.

Question declared carried.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 8.46 p.m. go dtí 8.47 a.m., Déardaoin, an 22 Deireadh Fómhair 2026.

The Dáil adjourned at 8.46 p.m. until 8.47 a.m. on Thursday, 22 October 2026.