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Tuesday, 24 February 2009.

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach i gceannas ar 2.30 p.m.

Paidir.
Prayer.

Business of Seanad.

An Cathaoirleach: I have received notice from Senator Fidelma Healy Eames that, on the motion for the Adjournment of the House today, she wishes to raise the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Education and Science to review the unique staffing position at Claddaghduff national school, Connemara, County Galway.

I have also received notice from Senator Pearse Doherty of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to deploy additional Garda personnel to stations in Donegal in order for the gardaí to be better equipped to respond to increased levels of crime, with particular reference to the latest spate of robberies in the area.

I have also received notice from Senator Eugene Regan of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Health and Children to confirm the current status, including the availability of funding, of the proposed development of the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dún Laoghaire, as provided for in the National Development Plan 2007-2013 and confirmed by the Department of Health and Children on 23 January 2007.

I have also received notice from Senator Cecilia Keaveney of the following matter:

[An Cathaoirleach.]

The need for the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to give an update on how well the towns of Buncrana, Moville, Greencastle, Clonmany and Ballyliffen fulfil European standards in regard to waste water and the processes that are in place between the local authorities and his Department to ensure such regulation compliance.

I have also received notice from Senator Joe O'Reilly of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Education and Science to outline his proposals for the refurbishment at St. Aidan's comprehensive school, Cootehill, County Cavan.

I regard the matters raised by Senators Healy Eames, Doherty and Regan as suitable for discussion on the Adjournment and they will be taken at the conclusion of business. Senators Keaveney and O'Reilly may give notice on another day of the matters they wish to raise.

Order of Business

Senator Donie Cassidy: The Order of Business is No. 1, motion re Diseases of Animals Act 1966, to be referred to Committee without debate at the conclusion of the Order of Business; No. 2 statements on the report, Awakening the West: Overcoming Social and Economic Inequality, to be taken at the conclusion of No. 1 and to conclude not later than 6 p.m., with spokespersons having 12 minutes and all other Senators seven minutes and on which Senators may share time by agreement of the House, and the Minister to be called upon ten minutes before the end of the debate for concluding comments and to take questions from Leaders and spokespersons.

Senator Frances Fitzgerald: Every Senator in this House is conscious of the very serious situation facing our country. As we visit our areas and speak to people, we find the public are deeply concerned, upset, frightened and looking for action, asking, "What is the solution?" They want to know who will come forward with a package of measures that will save our country, whether economically, politically or in banking. There is talk of a national Government.

When we have had a national Government in the past, it has been when there has been a minority Government and it has looked for support. This Government has a majority and can put forward whatever messages it chooses and whatever package of measures it chooses. However, what is required is decisive leadership.

As I said before, Fine Gael has put forward a package of measures which Members will see tomorrow night in the Private Members' motion on banking. What is the Government's response to that package of measures which Fine Gael has put forward to deal with the banking crisis?

We put forward proposals on public sector reform and decentralisation. We have talked about public sector reform over the past five years. Why has the Government not responded to these points we have been making, which would make a difference and would have meant we could have stopped some of the worst of the excesses we have seen in public spending and the serious financial situation in which the Government finds itself?

We will play our part, of that there is no question. The public wants every Member of the Oireachtas to play his or her part in leading our country out of this appalling abyss which we face in the range of areas I have outlined. I want to highlight the constructive nature of the proposals we have put forward and I ask for a Government response to them.

I wish to raise the HSE decision. There will be a €1 billion cutback in the health service. This cutback, which is so enormous and which has such implications for frontline services throughout the country, should be discussed in this House. I propose an amendment to the Order of Business that we ask the Minister for Health and Children to come to the House to outline to us the Government's view on this €1 billion cutback in the health service. What will its impact be? What services will close? Where will the cutbacks be made?

We have talked about reform of the HSE, about administrative reform and about how badly the move to the HSE was handled. Where will the reforms be made? Where will the cutbacks made? Who will pay the price? I would like the House to discuss this before a decision is taken by an unelected body later this week or next week. I would like Members on both sides to have an opportunity to take part in a debate about the radical changes which will be necessary if we are to continue to provide frontline services across the health service, which we should continue to do despite this recession. Let us have the debate in this House and let us talk together about the changes which are necessary to save this type of money, if it must be saved in our health service.

Senator Joe O'Toole: I note the CPSU will engage in industrial action on Thursday which will mean there will be a picket at the gates of the House. Obviously, it will not prevent Members of the Oireachtas from conducting their business under the Constitution. However, Members of the Oireachtas should show solidarity with those people who oil the wheels of business in this House. I will certainly not pass the picket on Thursday and I would like to hear the Leader's view on that. I understand there will be a picket outside the gates of the House from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Thursday.

I very much agree with the issues raised by Senator Frances Fitzgerald in regard to the responses put forward by the Opposition parties, in particular the issues raised in tomorrow night's Private Members' motion. However, I do not believe politics was improved last week by the insinuation by the main Opposition party, without a shred of evidence, that the Government was somehow involved in this golden circle. If there was evidence, it should have been shown. I was not impressed by it nor was I impressed by a Senator from the Government side waving a piece of paper like Charlie Haughey of old and telling us that there were ten names written on it. If people have that information, it should be made available to the House.

Senator Terry Leyden: I did not say there were ten names on it. The Senator should get what he says right.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator O'Toole, without interruption, on questions for the Leader.

Senator Joe O'Toole: That is irresponsible. On the same issue, the names of some of the people involved were published in a weekend newspaper. I do not know whether the facts are correct in their regard, but if they are, I have a question to raise. One of the people mentioned is the owner of a company called Mount Carmel Medical Group. That company has received permission to build some of the hospitals to be built on the grounds of public hospitals as part of the supposed co-location initiative of the HSE. I want a clear commitment from the Leader that we will not be so stupid or foolish as to give this company more profitable work to do if it already owes us €300 million or €400 million. We should not give such companies more profitable work that allows them to screw us again. Anybody involved in the Anglo Irish Bank debacle who owes us money should not be allowed to tender for public works, no more than a non tax compliant person would be. I want a clear understanding on this matter.

Two years ago, when the Green Party was still in Opposition, it was very upset by the commitment of Government in the budget at the time to put a significant sum aside to buy

[Senator Joe O'Toole.]

carbon credits. At the time the cost was \$15 a tonne, but this is now reduced to \$7 or \$8 a tonne. Therefore, there is a major saving of moneys that have been earmarked and put aside by Government for carbon credits. The Government should use the money saved for industry in the green economy, for example for green growers or energy from waste, and support that economy to make these industries more profitable and efficient.

Senator Alex White: Whatever strategy the Government devises to address the public finances and economic downturn, it is clear taxation will feature as part of it. Will the Leader establish from the Minister for Finance when it is intended the commission on taxation will bring forward its report? While the basis upon which the commission was set up was laudable, namely, to look at the balance of various taxation measures across the community, the context has changed considerably, given the situation in which we find ourselves. The question of taxation in any community is political rather than technical and is not something that falls to be resolved by a group of experts. This is not a criticism of the experts involved, who are well qualified in their field. Ultimately, the level, type and mix of taxation, the sort of issues raised by Senator Fitzgerald — to sustain public services at the level we wish to see in our community and to address the unfortunate hole that has emerged in the public finances — should be dealt with in the political rather than the purely technical context. In the current context, it is not acceptable to put off the issue and debate any longer. Nor is it acceptable that the debate should be left to an expert commission in the manner proposed.

Senator Shane Ross: Hear, hear.

Senator Alex White: It is essentially a political question. Therefore, let us have the proposals to debate.

Senator Fitzgerald called for the Government to come forward with proposals on job creation. It is unfortunate that we must read about such proposals in the newspapers rather than hear about them in the House. Rather than come into the Houses with her proposals, apparently the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment proposes to bring forward proposals on job creation at the Fianna Fáil Ard-Fheis this coming weekend, presumably in the forlorn hope that she will achieve some much needed applause there. However, the country needs to hear these proposals, not just those attending the Fianna Fáil Ard-Fheis. When is the Government going to bring forward a set of persuasive, convincing and plausible proposals on job creation?

Will the Leader ask the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to come to the House to explain what measures he proposes to take to address a very serious issue that has arisen for owners and people living in apartment blocks throughout the city of Dublin and no doubt in other urban centres also? In circumstances where developers cannot sell a large number of units within apartment blocks the charges to management companies fall to be sustained and taken up by the remaining owners in those complexes. That is most unfair. Legislation was proposed in the past and a Law Reform Commission report was produced. What will the Minister do about this? Will we debate the matter in the House?

Senator Eoghan Harris: In these hard times I ask that we take a moment to mark the passing of Christy Nolan. It is in no sentimental way that I say he is a metaphor for what we will have to do. He spent 43 years strapped in a wheelchair and with a device strapped to his forehead he tapped out three books, one of them a classic, namely, *Under the Eye of the Clock*. Yesterday, his sister, Yvonne, whom I know, wrote a very powerful tribute to him. I worked with her for a long time and she has the same tenacity and courage as her brother. Christy Nolan was what we would all hope to be in coming times. He was dealt a very hard hand, like the hand

this country has been dealt, through no fault of his own. He dealt with that hand with courage and tenacity and he did not rail or scream or behave badly. He took it and he got through it. At 43 years of age he died, with three books under his belt, with the help of his sister, Yvonne, and his parents. He was not institutionalised; the family looked after him.

We have been dealt a hard hand in this country and we can get some courage from a man such as Christy Nolan because he is a true hero. Yesterday, his sister, Yvonne, said that when she thinks of all the sweaty heroes in war films and of the way he, with his broken body, strapped to a wheelchair for 43 years, got through three books, he was the toughest, fiercest and bravest man she ever knew. All Senators in the House will wish to associate with me in taking a moment to pay tribute to a man who showed Hemingway's supreme virtue of grace under pressure.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: I second the proposition by Senator Fitzgerald that the Minister for Health and Children come to the Seanad to debate the proposed cutbacks by the HSE of €1 billion, an astronomical figure, which cannot take place without huge implications. We need to debate this because the focus of these cutbacks — this is why we need a debate — must be on the wastage with bonuses, inordinate salaries, consultant's reports and advisers and top-heavy administration wherever it exists. This time the focus must not be, as it always has been up to now — the Government stood by as this happened — on home help, home care assistants and support systems for people in need. We need a debate so that there can be a democratic input to the decisions. It is up to us to ensure the weak are not made scapegoats on this occasion and that the vulnerable are not hit. We must ensure the people who need support in their homes receive it and those who require visits to outpatient clinics and hospitals can make them.

This House must be told by the Minister what hospitals will close and what services will be cut. Where will the €1 billion be cut? This is a democratic question and not an administrative one. If the people on the other side of the House want to know today why there is public anger it is not because people do not accept the need for cutbacks. Everybody on the street knows we need to trim the national sails — that is understood — but the anger generates from the fact that the cutbacks are directed at the weak and the poor, at the baseline. People across the board will accept a fair system. Will the Leader invite the Minister for Health and Children to discuss this matter so that we can put a direction on where the €1 billion cuts will be made? We should influence that decision. It is our decision and we are elected by the people to do so. It is the HSE's function to administer our decisions. Our decision should be not to cut back on front-line services.

Senator Harris was correct to draw attention to the great man who was a hero and served as a role model for us all, Christy Nolan. His name is a very good one to which to refer but saluting his great life, tenacity and courage should make us realise that, in the process of making cutbacks of €1 billion, we should not hit the Christy Nolans throughout this country or future generations of Christy Nolans. That is our moral responsibility. The people on the street will back this House if we are cutting equitably but they are sick of cuts that are directed at the weak, poor and vulnerable.

Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: I want to raise a matter that has come to my attention in County Donegal, especially over the weekend. It concerns individuals from the North travelling across the Border once per week or month to collect social welfare payments. This is happening in Border counties, certainly in Donegal. Residents in areas such as Castlefin and Lifford in my constituency have pointed out that, in these stringent and difficult times, they have been moni-

[Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill.]

toring the phenomenon locally and have noticed people travelling across the bridge in Lifford to obtain social welfare payments from taxpayers in the Republic. This must be investigated.

The matter may have been raised in the other House but it is important that we raise it in this House. I call the Leader to arrange an urgent debate on this issue because it is happening at a time when individuals seeking to have carer's allowance payments processed must wait more than a year because of delays greater than 12 months in the appeals office. I know individuals in Donegal who have been waiting more than 12 months to have an application processed.

If we are subventing people from outside the jurisdiction, it is costing the Irish taxpayer money. While I acknowledge that those from another jurisdiction who are claiming social welfare in the Republic may be under financial strain, it is not our responsibility to pay for them. This must be addressed and I call for a debate on it in this House. It is my responsibility, as a citizen of this nation and also as a public representative, to bring the matter to the attention of this House which, in turn, should bring it to the attention of the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Mary Hanafin.

Senator Shane Ross: I want to say a few words on what was said by Senators Fitzgerald and Alex White. I do not know whether there should be a national Government — it is a difficult call to make and is a matter for political parties — but we should recognise that the Irish economy is at the eleventh hour. We now face very serious circumstances. This was stated in some media so it is fair enough to talk about it publicly. People are delicate about what they say publicly about the state of the fragile economy because they do not want to rock the boat. That is a responsible position for all members of the Opposition.

Nobody should be in any doubt that billions of euro left this country for overseas destinations last week. Presumably billions of euro are still leaving as panic is beginning to occur in the money and currency markets. That is an indication of the kind of precipice we are now going over. There seems to be a lack of recognition of this on the Government side of this House because it does not want to face the true facts. The facts are really very serious. I do not say this lightly but believe there is an increasing number of warnings. If anybody goes overseas, he will hear the view of the Irish economy and note it is very different from the one conveyed by Members of this House, the Government and everybody else in Ireland. We are living in a fool's paradise and are very close to a disaster nationally.

3 o'clock
Senator Alex White is correct that it is simply crazy that we can somehow wait for a commission on taxation to report before we take necessary measures. Anybody who listened to Peter Sutherland today on the "News at One" will have heard his warning that there may not be money out there. It is all very well for us to say the International Monetary Fund will assist us, but there are two problems in that regard. First, the International Monetary Fund may intervene when it is too late. A perceptive article in the *Financial Times* today indicated the IMF may not have any money by the time we look for it. We are constantly looking for someone from overseas to rescue us who may not be there to do so.

Neither should we bank on Europe. Germany is not necessarily going to help out the Irish nation either, as it is looking to help out Austria and the east. We cannot sit back and say it will be okay, that Europe will help us, the IMF will help us, or somebody else will help us and it will be okay by Christmas because we will have a commission on taxation. The urgency of the situation is realised by every nation and every investor outside Ireland, but it is not recognised here.

I support the proposal by my colleagues, Senator Norris, Senator O'Toole and others, that it is essential that we should have at least a weekly debate in this House on the economy or

some recognition of the emergency situation if we are somehow to inject into the Irish people the urgency of the need to take action immediately not tomorrow.

Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Mark Daly: I agree with Senator Harris's description of Christopher Nolan as a true hero, a man who, despite his illness, managed to rise above it and produce great works of literature. One of the backers of Libertas, Mr. McEvaddy, described the ten people who got a free bet at the expense of the taxpayer as heroes. I suggest that he get a new dictionary because the current description of "hero" in his dictionary seems to be in error.

I also agree with the Minister, Deputy Noel Dempsey, who described those who rode roughshod over law and order in this country when it came to the banking system as being guilty of economic treason. I welcome the fact the Garda has gone through the files at Anglo Irish Bank. I hope criminal prosecutions will follow and those who are guilty of economic treason will see the inside of Mountjoy Prison.

Senator Nicky McFadden: While not losing sight of the banking issue I wish to follow Senator Fitzgerald who referred to the €1 billion that must be found for the health service. Professor Drumm is blaming the poor unfortunates who have lost their jobs who are now signing on the dole because they are now having to take up medical cards and the Health Service Executive is also at the loss of the 1% health levy. I find that extraordinary given the money that has been spent on spin doctors for Professor Drumm alone. What does the Department of Health and Children now do and how many people are employed in it?

I support Senator Fitzgerald's amendment to the Order of Business that the Minister, Deputy Harney, would come to the House. I am always amazed at how she is able to speak off the cuff but I would like honest, straight facts from her this time. What about the children who have not been able to avail of the cervical cancer vaccine? What about the children who are ill and who have been taken out of school because there is no money for special needs or to employ a care worker to assist them at school? I admire the noble comments about the great author but these are the vulnerable people and it is not the directors of the banks who have to pay the price, it is the most vulnerable in society. I urge the Leader to take serious note of what I say.

Senator Donie Cassidy: I always do.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: Senator Ó Domhnaill called for an investigation into the number of people making fraudulent social welfare claims in the north west. A total of €18 million was saved on such claims in the north west in 2008. Will the Leader confirm that was the beginning of an investigation into activities resulting in losses to the State's coffers?

The number of Northern Ireland registered cars being driven in the State has increased significantly and this deprives the economy of taxes through vehicle registration tax. Greater focus is needed on this issue because our motor trade is under enough pressure without people being allowed to freely exploit the Border in this regard.

Following the concerns I raised last week regarding burglaries and vigilante activity in my peninsula, has the Leader arranged time for a discussion on the justice portfolio, the Garda Reserve, the neighbourhood watch and community alert schemes and the local authority public forums?

In welcoming the investigation into Anglo Irish Bank, which is overtly happening now, I refer to the issue of the HSE's €1.4 billion shortfall. We tended to reward failure in the past. If a hospital had a long waiting list, it received more money. However, it is important that

[Senator Cecilia Keaveney.]

patients are at the core of spending and if that does not happen, management should not be rewarded for mismanagement.

Senator David Norris: I am glad Senator Harris mentioned the late Christopher Nolan who was a very remarkable writer. Approximately 20 years ago, I gave a course of lectures in Trinity College Dublin about *Ulysses* and I heard a snorting, choking sound from the back of the lecture hall, which I realised was the most wonderful of sounds — the human laugh. Christopher Nolan's mother was there. He did not get very much from the State by way of support, services or anything else. What made the difference was that extraordinary, courageous and remarkable woman who saw, trapped in that damaged body, a real and sensitive intellect, and without her nothing would have happened. He would have remained trapped in that wheelchair. She deserves the thanks of the Irish reading public and of humanity for the wonderful way in which she supported her son. It cannot have been easy. That love and affection made all the difference to the life of this man. It is cause for celebration that, as Senator Harris said, he died at the age of 43. That is young but he lived longer than many people live on this planet and what a remarkable achievement he had to his name. His mother allowed him to bring that life to fruition. That was a completed life with a substantial achievement.

I would like a debate on the health services and I would also like a debate on the issue of the Combat Poverty Agency. I have a flimsy, tawdry, little report that confirms exactly what many of us thought would happen when the Government abolished the agency, which is that we would have a pseudo Combat Poverty Agency. When will we have a discussion on this matter?

I propose that we take No. 34 today, that is, the motion in the name of the Independents, which has the support of virtually all Senators. Senator Ross gave clear support for this and he is an authority on this matter. We should have a debate on the economy because, once again, it has consumed almost all the time devoted to the Order of Business. It is a very important issue, but this disaster or catastrophe, whatever one wishes to call it, is not a volcano, an earthquake or a tsunami. It is man made and it is, therefore, capable of human resolution. At its core is a lack of understanding of what has occurred in the money markets and to the concept of money. I would welcome an opportunity to give my views on it. Without a complete recalibration of the money market to bring the symbolic value of money back into alignment with human effort, we will return to the beginning of the cycle, namely, bartering. The one thing going for this island is that we can probably feed ourselves, but that is about as far as I would go.

I hope we will have a debate on the issue and I will not trespass any further on the time of the House. There was a debate on Iraq. We are facing an urgent issue and we must give ourselves the opportunity to debate it.

I respect my colleague, Senator O'Toole, and his decision not to pass the picket line, but I will pass it. Last Saturday, I marched in solidarity with the ushers and other officials of the House, but I am paid by the taxpayer to attend and try to address subjects. God knows, we do not meet so often that we could afford to waste one day. I will be in attendance and, while I hope that I will not need to pass the picket line, it will be the first picket line that I will have ever passed. It is what I am paid to do. In this serious situation, it would not be proper for me in all good conscience to stay outside the House.

Senator John Hanafin: In light of what has occurred this morning in respect of Anglo Irish Bank, it is time we asked the Leader for a debate on regulation. In many respects, it might be late to do so now, but the matter must be addressed at national, European and wider international levels.

The so-called big bang in London in the 1980s was not a question of deregulation, rather it was a question of no regulation. Captains Blackbeard and Kidd, the pirates of the Caribbean, were better regulated than some of the people who were mismanaging the world's economy and caused the cataclysm with which we are dealing. The Lehman Brothers, Bear Stearns and London's finance houses have visited trillions in toxic debts upon the world. Let us be clear in that whatever problems we have are minuscule compared with the damage wrought upon us.

I wish to comment on the Combat Poverty Agency. I would prefer to see smaller reports and money going to people who need it. Were reports able to solve poverty, we would have won the war a long time ago.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I join other Senators in paying tribute to Christopher Nolan and, in particular, to his mother. Their family epitomises the Irish spirit. One of his books, *Under the Eye of the Clock*, shows the depth of personality that is required of everyone in this time of recession. Christopher Nolan did not choose to be born the way he was. Likewise, the Government made political decisions that got us into this political and economic mess.

I ask the Leader for a debate on two issues, the first of which would be on the role of Government in society. Last Saturday, ordinary people wanted to be heard because they had not been heard or listened to by Fianna Fáil for the past 12 years. The lack of leadership is creating a political vacuum.

Will the Leader invite the Minister for Health and Children to the House as a matter of urgency? Like Senator Fitzgerald and others, I am asking for a debate on a matter raised in this morning's *Irish Examiner*, namely, that some €16,000 per month is paid to an adviser.

Senator Paschal Donohoe: Per week.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator must keep the newspaper down.

Senator Rónán Mullen: No props.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: That money would pay for many nurses, special needs assistants and services.

Senator John Paul Phelan: Hear, hear.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Cutbacks amounting to €1 billion are not being taken from the top half of society, but from the lower half.

I remind the Leader and his friends on the other side of the House that the weak, the old and the handicapped will suffer. If they seek a national Government, they should take up the Fine Gael themes and ideas of responsibility and accountability. They should not hide behind the regulator or the banks.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator has made his point.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: They are the political friends of the regulator and the bank and this mess is on their political heads.

An Cathaoirleach: The point is made.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Members have heard nothing but comments from both sides of the Leader's mouth for the past six months.

An Cathaoirleach: Please, Senator Buttimer. Your point has been made.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: It is time for leadership.

An Cathaoirleach: I call Senator MacSharry.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I will finish by confirming that I will not pass the picket next Thursday.

An Cathaoirleach: Please, Senator.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I will stand in solidarity with the ordinary people of Ireland——

An Cathaoirleach: I call Senator MacSharry. I ask Senator Buttimer to resume his seat.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: ——who want leadership.

Senator Marc MacSharry: I join my colleague, Senator Hanafin, in calling for a debate on regulation. In particular, our European colleagues should take some leadership in developing a pan-European approach to regulation. While baby steps in several directions have been taken, nationally and internationally, it is clear that the definitive path that will lead the global economy out of the present turmoil has not been found. I ask the Leader to raise this issue with the Taoiseach, in order that, in turn, he can suggest to leaders throughout the European Union and globally that a global initiative should be taken immediately to come up with a regulatory agreement regarding the financial services industry. I refer to a few basic rules to which we will adhere globally into the future as we seek to emerge from the international recession.

Closer to home, as we continue to adjust the sails to deal with the winds we currently face, it would be most appropriate to hold an urgent debate on the Health Service Executive. The project of having 30% of the State's finances under the control of a third party organisation has failed. This issue must be addressed urgently and the Leader should take it to the Minister for Health and Children as a matter of the utmost urgency.

This leads me to a third issue that I believe also is of the utmost importance. The HSE and similar organisations have been established because for some reason we sought to erode the democratic mandate of politicians, be they councillors, Deputies or Members of this House. I believe that, as the people's representatives, regardless of whether they fail them, power rests with the Houses of the Oireachtas and local authorities. Simply because it has become the practice to take away from elected representatives the power to carry out work and expend money on services on the people's behalf does not mean that it is the law. I seek a return to democracy.

Senator Frances Fitzgerald: Hear, hear.

Senator Marc MacSharry: To start that process, I believe it is unacceptable that 30% of the State's purse is under the control of third party organisations which, as Members have seen, have €51 million to make people like Professor Keane maintain his celebrity status. I look forward to an urgent debate in this regard.

An Cathaoirleach: I do not wish to hear mention of the names of those who are not in the House.

Senator Marc MacSharry: I wish to make a point in this regard. While I have every respect for the Cathaoirleach, the names one can or cannot mention in this House are highly selective. When someone has a particular——

An Cathaoirleach: That is a matter for the Chair.

Senator Marc MacSharry: My point is that when someone makes a specific point——

An Cathaoirleach: It is a matter for the Chair.

Senator Marc MacSharry: ——pertaining to a specific part of Government policy or action of this State and regarding expenditure that relates to that person, I believe it is absolutely appropriate to name that person.

An Cathaoirleach: I do not wish to hear names.

Senator Marc MacSharry: Under what Standing Order does it state that one cannot name an individual?

An Cathaoirleach: A precedent has been set by the Chair not to name those who are not present.

Senator Pearse Doherty: As Members meet today, a couple of hundred yards away gardaí from the fraud squad are carrying out raids on the headquarters of Anglo Irish Bank. I am sure this will be welcomed by the public because there is a clear need to move on the bankers and gangsters who at least partially got us into this mess. There also is a need to stop the drip-feed of information. Undoubtedly, carrying out the raid at this time will damage our reputation internationally. Last weekend, I read that Ministers stated that the names of the golden circle undoubtedly would be revealed in time and that the Government would welcome this. Again, this drip-feed effect will have a damaging impact on our economy and reputation. I suggest that Seanad or Dáil privilege should be used to let the people know exactly who was bailed out when this guarantee was given.

Senator Joe O'Toole: Hear, hear.

Senator Pearse Doherty: People should be informed as to who are the ten individuals. If the Government does not have the brass neck——

Senator David Norris: It has that all right.

Senator Pearse Doherty: ——or the liathróidí to do it, it should give me the names and I will use Seanad privilege to name and shame the people who have committed economic treason against the taxpayers of this State. The ordinary people demand it.

Let us consider the example of what happened approximately a decade ago when bankers advised people from my constituency and many other constituencies. These were people who cut turf for the local power station for a living and when it closed down they went to their bankers with the redundancy payment. What did the bankers direct them to do? They directed them to put it into offshore accounts. The Government imposed massive penalties and named and shamed each and every one of them. Pensioners and others with life savings were robbed by the State, and were named and shamed, yet the Government is hiding the names of the golden circle which is what is angering the public.

The sitting on Thursday does not deal with any legislation. It deals with statements on the Middle East, which is something we can do after 6 o'clock this evening. I am asking the Leader not to force people to have to make a choice to pass a public sector picket on the gates of this House. That should not be a choice asked of Members of the House or of members of unions in this House.

Senator David Norris: Hear, hear.

Senator Pearse Doherty: Workers need to stand together in the public and private sectors. As a representative of workers and people who are not working at this time, I for one will not pass those pickets.

An Cathaoirleach: I call Senator Cummins.

Senator Pearse Doherty: I support the proposal for a debate on the impact of cuts on the health service. Senator Keaveney is correct. Bad management should not be rewarded. The €1 billion cuts will not be coming from the massive pay of Professor Brendan Drumm, Professor Keane or any others.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator should not name names.

Senator Pearse Doherty: They will come from people who provide front-line services. That is where the cuts will be imposed.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator should not name people who are not here.

Senator Pearse Doherty: The Government, as it has done for past year, is attacking the vulnerable, weak and the sick.

Senator Maurice Cummins: Drug offences have soared by more than 75% in the past four years. There is a definite link between the drug trade and gangland crime. The Government has failed to tackle drug-fuelled gangland crime in recent years. People are regularly being assassinated on the streets. These people are terrorists and should be tackled as such.

Senator Joe O'Toole: Hear, hear.

Senator Maurice Cummins: If we need further legislation to tackle this terrorist crime it should be introduced earlier rather than delaying it. We need to give the authorities all the tools necessary to tackle these terrorists. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to the unarmed gardaí who tackled gunmen last Sunday in Westmanstown. It puts into focus the work the Garda is doing on our behalf every day. We need to give it the tools to tackle these terrorists.

Senator David Norris: Well said.

Senator Rónán Mullen: I wish to be associated with the words of tribute to the late Christopher Nolan, but I do not intend to link him with any of the current political controversy. When in secondary school I was very taken by his winning of the Whitbread award. Although I have not seen it in recent days, I remember a quotation of his when he said, "Accept me for what I am and I'll accept you for what you're accepted as." Christopher Nolan and many like him are testament to the enduring dignity of the human person and also testament to the power of unconditional love. Especially in times of crisis when people are tempted to look out for their own interests alone to the exclusion of others', that man's dignity despite his disability and the great love of his mother, which was unconditional from the moment she welcomed him into this world, send out a very powerful message to us all. I hope he is now enjoying the happiness for which he long aspired.

I would like to add a few brief comments to Senator Ross's very sobering words earlier. Government is a difficult business because it must straddle the task of being transparent and honest in its dealings while at the same time ensuring in times of crisis that people's confidence and morale is maintained. The approach of "don't frighten the horses" has gone on too long and has not served us well as a society. Those who were warned about talking down the

economy or were described as whingers and naysayers were ultimately vindicated in their worrying analysis of the way things were going. People have gone into a rut in politics——

An Cathaoirleach: We cannot have a debate now. We cannot have speeches. Senators should request a debate of the Leader.

Senator Rónán Mullen: Does the Leader agree the time has come when we must find an alternative to oppositional politics and we need our television to provide this service? There have been television programmes dramatising the possible effects of a nuclear catastrophe and it is time that we had serious, exceptional television to take people through the very grim realities that face us. This will help us as a nation to reflect on issues of security, whether we can pay our gardaí and nurses, and that is why Senators Norris and Ross are correct——

An Cathaoirleach: The point is made.

Senator Rónán Mullen: I did not get to speak on the last day. They are correct to say that we need a rolling debate on the economy.

While I acknowledge that Senator O'Toole and others feel a need to pay their union dues, so to speak——

Senator Joe O'Toole: It is respect for the workers.

Senator Rónán Mullen: ——it would be a bad precedent if we were to refuse to pass some pickets while, every other day, we come in and leave other people picketing at the gate. We have a job to do and we sympathise with people in their concerns——

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Mullen has made his point. It is for the Leader to order the business.

Senator Rónán Mullen: ——but we do not think that striking is appropriate.

Senator John Paul Phelan: I join other Senators in expressing my sympathy on the death of Mr. Christopher Nolan. I was in secondary school when he won the Whitbread prize for *Under the Eye of the Clock*. It was a remarkable achievement and I remember the national pride that an Irishman won such an award, particularly one who had overcome such difficulties in his life. I join Government Senators who seek a debate on regulation. We should have such a debate. I was a member of the Joint Committee on Finance and the Public Service for five years and the former Minister for Finance, Mr. Charlie McCreevy, who was in office for most of that period, was a firm believer that our financial sector was over-regulated. It is only in the past few weeks, as European Commissioner, that he seems to have changed that view.

Senator Alex White: Hear, hear.

Senator John Paul Phelan: Whether that was under pressure from Mr. Barroso or elsewhere, he seems to have done a U-turn. A number of months ago I attended a committee meeting where Mr. Pat Farrell, a well-known friend of Fianna Fáil and head of the Irish Banking Federation——

An Cathaoirleach: I do not want names mentioned, no matter who they are friends with, if people are not present.

Senator John Paul Phelan: He is a former Senator and was a guest of an Oireachtas committee when he expressed the view that the financial sector is over-regulated. I welcome the fact that the Government belatedly thinks that we need some serious regulation in that regard.

I join my colleagues in asking for the Minister for Health and Children to attend to discuss the cutbacks in the HSE. In the constituency in which I live, I met a young man with four boys who are all aged five, with two sets of twins born in the same year. His wife died last year and he was given ten hours home help by the HSE. He received a letter two weeks ago, not telling him that his hours were to be cut back, but that they would be cut completely. That will force him out of his employment, as a self-employed haulier, to look after his four children. It is an absolute disgrace if that sector is hit. Mr. Drumm is supposed to advise the Minister, that is his role, and his advisers are paid huge amounts and huge bonuses. That is where we must seek economies in respect of the HSE.

Regarding the announcement, leaked or otherwise last week, by Teagasc, it seems, if these cutbacks come into practice, that only two of the six existing agricultural colleges will offer education to those who wish to get involved in agriculture. This is happening after thousands of people around my age took jobs on building sites. Those jobs no longer exist and the people want to come back into agriculture. The installation aid grant has been removed, as has the pension scheme for parents who may want to hand over the farm. Now, at the wrong time for the sector and the economy in general, there is talk of cutting places in agricultural colleges. There is a paltry amount of money involved.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator's point has been made. I call on the Leader.

Senator John Paul Phelan: The Government should look again at the Teagasc plan.

An Cathaoirleach: I call on the Leader to reply. I apologise to Senators Glynn, Coffey, Donohoe and Quinn, whom I will call first in the morning.

Senator Donie Cassidy: Senators Fitzgerald, O'Toole, Alex White, Ross, McFadden, Doherty and Mullen once again stressed the importance of debating the economy on a weekly basis. As I have indicated on the Order of Business since we came back in early September, this has been the case and this week is no different. We will have the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Bill 2009 all day on Friday and I am sure colleagues can make their contributions on the Bill with the Minister present. The assistance and advice that can be given by colleagues and Members of the House to the Minister, the Department and the Government has never been more relevant. This is particularly true with those who have vast experience in the banking area.

We have much difficulty because of the depth of the problem, which is being divulged on a daily basis. Until we get to the end of that we will not know when the corner will be turned. Much of the world will tonight look at television to see the first state of the union address by the new US President, Barack Obama. There is also interest in the £500 billion that British Prime Minister Gordon Brown proposes to invest in the UK.

I have always been of the belief that until the US and the UK start to turn the corner and get their economies going again, we will not succeed in that regard as our economy is linked to theirs. We are learning on an hourly and a daily basis of the difficulties and operations that have occurred in the banks for a long time. That is being assessed and I hope that in the not too distant future, when all this is at hand, the master plan expected from the Government and the Taoiseach will be put in place, with corrective measures. How can one put a master plan in place until we know exactly the depth of the problem? We may know 80% of it but until such a plan is implemented, people must be realistic and reasonable.

Listening again to Senator Ross today outlining his serious concerns about the plight we are in, I will look forward to his contribution on Friday when the Bill is in the House. As I have often said, he has much experience in this area of banking and finance in particular.

Senators John Paul Phelan, Fitzgerald, O'Toole, O'Reilly, Keaveney, Norris, MacSharry and Doherty called for an urgent debate relating to the HSE. I will endeavour to have this take place at the earliest time next week. As we all know, this is an urgent issue as there is a proposed reduction of €1 billion from the €15 billion budget. Some of us served on the former health boards — Senator McFadden's father and I served with the Cathaoirleach and other colleagues in the House — which spent many days deliberating over budgets. Since the HSE took over, in the midland area there has been an increase in staffing levels of between 20% and 25%. If the difficulty is to arise in reductions, it should not be on the front line, with those who are working hardest or those who are most needed or serving the underprivileged. As has been stated this afternoon, reductions should target top-heavy administration. Why do we need top-heavy administration when there is high-tech computerisation? An in-depth analysis, which would take no more than a fortnight or three weeks, would provide answers. The Minister owes it to both Houses to have this done immediately.

There is to be a reduction, which should go back to the times when the former health boards did the work of the HSE with efficient staff and those on the front line at that time. The additional staff are doing good work but staff on the front line should be protected.

In a despatch yesterday a response to a question was that medical cards and the medical card scheme are very expensive. That sort of challenging talk will not be accepted by Government or anybody in either House of the Oireachtas. All that has been going on for some considerable time. Ultimately, we must look after those on the margins, the underprivileged and those who need it most. That message must go out loud and clear to the HSE.

Senator David Norris: It should go to the Leader's Government for a start.

An Cathaoirleach: The Leader, without interruption.

Senator Donie Cassidy: It is our Government, the Senator's and mine. Senator O'Toole mentioned carbon credits and I will pass to the Minister the Senator's very good suggestion. It is a budgetary issue that will come forward in the next budget.

Senator Alex White spoke of the Commission on Taxation report, which is due. I intend to give the fullest time in the House in the coming weeks for Senators to make submissions on the proposed commission report. Why should we not have the opportunity to let our opinions be considered by those who are compiling the report? Senators referred to the Tánaiste and job creation efforts. We look forward to announcements by the Tánaiste, no matter what forum it is in, this week.

Senators, Daly, Norris, Buttimer, Mullen and John Paul Phelan joined Senator Harris, who brought the matter to the House, in expressing condolences on the death of Christy Nolan and noting his genius. Mr. Nolan's mother is possibly one of the unsung heroes of modern times. I wish to be associated with those comments and, as somebody who has been closely associated with the arts for many years, I know this man has been incredible. We all feel a huge loss at his passing. He served the arts and his stay on earth with remarkable distinction.

Senators Ó Domhnaill and Keaveney called for a debate with the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Mary Hanafin, on social welfare, particularly the savings in cross-Border activity and the difficulty and challenges meeting the Department in this area. Senator Keaveney highlighted some good work, where €18 million was saved in the north west in the past year. I will have no difficulty in having time left aside for this.

[Senator Donie Cassidy.]

Senator Keaveney also spoke of the big increase in the number of northern-registered cars on our roads in the Republic. The Minister is considering the issue as a matter of urgency and we had a long debate on it last week at the Fianna Fáil parliamentary party meeting. We all stressed the importance of addressing this matter.

Senator Mary White's husband, Padraic White, who was born on the Border, was on a wonderful programme on television last night with Brian Cody on Sunday. It is another example of good television about the unsung heroes and great achievers of our country. Mr. White explained that when he took over the IDA in the 1970s, the roads around the Border were all blocked. Thank God they are now open and whatever challenges that now have to be met, we will look into the matter and meet them. I have no difficulty in passing this on to the Minister after the Order of Business today.

Senators Hanafin, MacSharry and John Paul Phelan called for a debate on regulation. This is timely and coincides with next Friday's debate. I hope the Senators will bring the issue to the attention of the Minister when he is in the House on Friday. Senator Buttimer called for a debate on the role of Government in the economy, which can also be discussed on Friday in the all-day debate of the Bill.

Senator Cummins drew to the attention of the House the increase in crime arising from what appears to be drug related offences and gangland crime and to what must be done to assist the Garda Síochána in tackling it. If legislation needs to be amended, this House, the Dáil and the Minister will not be found wanting. Five Bills under the justice portfolio are on the Government's legislative programme for this session, which is the maximum number a Department can bring forward. Successive Ministers in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform have been to the fore during the past ten years in meeting the challenges presented and updating the legislation as required.

I join other speakers in paying tribute to the young garda who, on coming off the hurling field in Westmanstown last Sunday, courageously put his life at risk to apprehend the person who committed that dreadful crime. I also congratulate the retired officers from the force who assisted him in doing that.

I have taken on board Senator Mullen's views on this House getting its message across on television. I agree with many of the sentiments he expressed.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Fitzgerald has proposed an amendment to the Order of Business: "That statements on the €1 billion cutbacks to be made in the Health Service Executive be taken today." Is the amendment being pressed.

Senator Frances Fitzgerald: Yes.

Amendment put.

The Seanad divided: Tá, 17; Níl, 28.

Tá

Bacik, Ivana.
Burke, Paddy.
Buttimer, Jerry.
Coffey, Paudie.
Cummins, Maurice.
Doherty, Pearse.
Donohoe, Paschal.
Fitzgerald, Frances.
Hannigan, Dominic.

McFadden, Nicky.
Norris, David.
O'Reilly, Joe.
O'Toole, Joe.
Phelan, John Paul.
Ross, Shane.
Ryan, Brendan.
White, Alex.

Níl

Boyle, Dan.
 Brady, Martin.
 Butler, Larry.
 Callely, Ivor.
 Cannon, Ciaran.
 Carty, John.
 Cassidy, Donie.
 Corrigan, Maria.
 Daly, Mark.
 de Búrca, Déirdre.
 Feeney, Geraldine.
 Glynn, Camillus.
 Hanafin, John.
 Harris, Eoghan.

Keaveney, Cecilia.
 Kett, Tony.
 Leyden, Terry.
 MacSharry, Marc.
 Ó Domhnaill, Brian.
 Ó Murchú, Labhrás.
 O'Brien, Francis.
 O'Donovan, Denis.
 O'Malley, Fiona.
 O'Sullivan, Ned.
 Ormonde, Ann.
 Phelan, Kieran.
 White, Mary M.
 Wilson, Diarmuid.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Maurice Cummins and Nicky McFadden; Níl, Senators Camillus Glynn and Diarmuid Wilson.

Amendment declared lost.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator David Norris moved an amendment to the Order of Business that No. 31, motion 34 be taken today. The amendment was not seconded and the amendment subsequently falls.

Order of Business agreed to.

Diseases of Animals Act: Motion.

Senator Donie Cassidy: I move:

That the proposal that Seanad Éireann resolves that section 17A (inserted by section 2(1) of the Diseases of Animals (Amendment) Act 2001 (No. 3 of 2001)) of the Diseases of Animals Act 1966 (No. 6 of 1966) shall continue in force for the period ending on 8 March 2010, be referred to the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in accordance with paragraph (1) (Seanad) of the Orders of Reference of that committee which, not later than 5 March 2009, shall send a message to the Seanad in the manner prescribed in Standing Order 72, and Standing Order 74(2) shall accordingly apply.

Question put and agreed to.

Development of the West: Statements.

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Cuirim fáilte roimh cuid de na moltaí atá sa tuarascáil on Chomhchoiste Oireachtas um Ghnóthaí Ealaíon, Spóirt, Turasóireachta, Pobail, Tuaithe Agus Gaeltachta agus tá taithí mhaith agam ar an chuid is mó díobh sin. Tá riar mhaith eile de mholtaí sa tuarascáil nach mbaineann go díreach le réimse mo Roinne féin ach mar Aire sinsearach atá mar bhall den Rialtas, cuirim spéis iontu fiú muna n-aontaíom go h-iomlán leo. Failtím roimh an tacaíocht atá léirithe sa tuarascáil do na gníomhaíochtaí atá ar bun ag an Rialtas chun dul i ngleic le titim daonra sna ceantair is iargúlta sa tír mar atá ar bun le CLÁR. Tá me sásta freisin go dtugann an tuarascáil aitheantas don tábhacht a bhaineann le hinfreastruchtúr cosúil le conair bhóthar an Atlantaigh a fhorbairt agus le hiarnróid an iarthair a ath-oscailt.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

Is bailiúchán cuimsitheach é an tuarascáil de na rudaí uile a dhéanfa dá mbeadh cead do chinn agat do rogha polasaí a chur i bhfeidhm agus múna mbeadh ceist ar bith ann faoi mhaoiniú Stáit agus mar sin de. Ag an am céanna, ní mór dúinn ag an am ghátair seo don eacnamaíocht dhomhanda breathnú céard iad na céimeanna gur féidir linn uile a thógáil le cheile chun teacht slán as na dúshláin eacnamúil atá ann faoi láthair.

The publication of the Oireachtas joint committee report comes at a time of severe global economic challenge.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: On a point of order, can we have a copy of the Minister's speech?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It makes some points which I do not agree with but it is important that collectively we look at all aspects of the challenges we are faced with and that Government then gives leadership on the delivery of our policy objectives. It has become common in our society to play the blame game and to expect somebody else to solve every problem. Governments must lead and we are both energised and committed to doing everything we can to safeguard our prosperity, even when it means making tough and sometimes unpopular decisions. We can only solve the problems, however, if the people are motivated and encouraged to become part of the solution. The next phase of our development will come from within ourselves.

At present, it is impossible to open a newspaper or turn on the news without hearing about the national and global economic situation. As everybody knows, we will face great challenges in overcoming the present global economic crisis. From my experience of running businesses, I know it is no easy thing to continue to trade from week to week or month to month in tough economic times. As somebody who worked in business and enterprise, I have also learned that it is important not to dismiss any opportunity available to us. Sometimes when the challenge is greatest, it drives one to look at those opportunities that might have been overlooked in the past. We have to encourage people to look around them for new opportunities, to identify potential areas of enterprise and to be innovative.

In terms of developing the west, I trust we can all agree on the fundamental point that the western region is intrinsically a good place to live. In any initiative to develop the west we never fall short of that measurement of quality of life. We should not be complacent about the challenges facing rural and western Ireland, but I know from my work in the most disadvantaged communities in the State — all 46 of them are urban communities — that the day-to-day challenges they face are far more extreme and pronounced than any disadvantage in rural Ireland. There is no deprivation in rural Ireland on a community level like that faced by those in urban areas and statistics from sociologists bear me out on this issue. As part of the RAPID programme, a remapping process was carried out on this basis and the results are solidly the same.

The quality of life the west offers is a key strength of the region and is a strength that must not be taken for granted. Time and again I have seen people who on the one hand are looking for industry to come to the west and on the other are painting a view of the west that is totally foreign to the west I live in and where there are a significant number of advantages. I often wonder how anybody could be expected to come this region if it is as bad as people say it is. I know the challenges. I developed industry from the ground up when we did not even have telephones. The one thing I knew was that there were advantages to the region if we put our minds to it.

Some people regard quality of life as a so-called soft issue. However, all economic activity is, at its heart, about people. What people want, where they choose to live, work and spend

their holidays all affect the economic well-being of the country. It is worth remembering that Leitrim, once faced with falling population and now with its high influx of artists and craftspeople, is currently the county with the highest share of its total employment in the creative sector. It had 11% intercensus growth. We, in the west, must harness the advantages we have and continue to make it attractive for people with drive and initiative to relocate there.

The joint Oireachtas committee report states that depopulation in rural areas is going untackled. It cites the population decline suffered by western counties between 1926 and 2002. I highlighted that first when I set up the CLÁR programme. This point reaffirms the rationale on which the Government's CLÁR programme was based. The Government set up the CLÁR programme precisely because population decline is a reason to develop and improve rural areas rather than to neglect them. However, the report does not point to the fact that every county in the west increased in population between 2002 and 2006 and that the Connacht-Ulster region grew faster than the national average during that time. Surprisingly, the province with the lowest population growth was Munster.

4 o'clock Bhunaigh muid CLÁR chun déileáil leis na míbhuntáistí sna ceantair tuaithe is iargúlta sa tír. Tá go leor obair déanta ag CLÁR mar shampla chun feabhas a chur ar na háiseanna atá ag scoileanna beaga tuaithe agus chun infreastruchtúr riachtanach cosúil le seirbhísí uisce agus séarachais, ionaid sláinte agus bóithre a chur ar fáil agus a uasghrádú. Is é ceann de na rudaí is fearr a rinne CLÁR do na gnóna beaga tuaithe, mar shampla, ná cabhrú leo chun an ceangail leictreachais a uasghrádú go 3-phás dóibh agus tá an obair sin déanta ar fud na tuaithe.

I do not believe we can seriously deny the construction and development of new infrastructure that has taken place across the west ranging from new national roads and improvements to local and regional roads. Throughout the western region and throughout the islands and the Gaeltacht, in particular, much work has been done to address infrastructural deficits in terms of piers, harbours and local roads.

Tá an rialtas tiomanta don infheistíocht san infreastruchtúr faoin phlean forbartha náisiúnta cé go bhfuil níos mó brú orainn ó thaobh achmhainí de. Beidh an tógáil ar na mórbhealaigh idir-chathrach críochnaithe an bhliain seo chugainn, Gaillimh san áireamh. Beidh an iarnród idir Inis agus Baile Átha an Rí á ath-oscailt le linn na bliana seo. Tá plean ann chun é sin a shíneadh comh fada le Clár Chlainne Mhuiris. Is céim stairiúil chun chinn in fhorbairt an iarthair.

In a time of crisis, it can be difficult to see beyond today or this week but this Government's commitment to infrastructure derives from the fact the construction itself offers jobs for people in the short term and that in the long term, it will be the platform from which we catch the inevitable upturn in global economic fortunes. A time of crisis can also be the source of innovation and the very pressures that crises bring often force people to look at new opportunities. My heart goes out to all those people currently faced with losing their jobs and losing income. It is our task to create a positive energy out of the challenges facing us and to identify better ways of doing business and new ways to generate income.

The importance of exploiting opportunities for micro-enterprises and small enterprises based on natural local resources would seem to me one of the ways forward. This is particularly true now because of the high level of skill and education that our people have received. We must use our ingenuity. We have valuable untapped resources in this country. Instead of being negative and dwelling on what we do not have, we should focus on finding new ways of maximising the potential of what we do have.

It is extraordinary that, historically, the most overlooked natural resource is the ocean. Many people are unaware that Ireland has a larger sea area than land area. The joint Oireachtas committee report raises the issue of the decline of the sea fishing sector and although the same

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

opportunities in that industry are no longer available to coastal communities, there are other marine-based opportunities for our coastal communities. We have already invested in small piers and harbours around the country but we have barely started to develop the enormous potential for marine leisure and recreation in terms of regional and local development and job creation, both in the marine leisure area and in ancillary services and spin-offs. Kilmore Quay in Wexford is a good, living example of this. I understand there are major developments taking place in Valencia harbour.

It is important to remember that no leisure industry or form of recreation exists in isolation. The area of marine leisure is a potential goldmine. Within the larger context of rural development and diversification, marine leisure offers us the opportunity to foster vibrant, sustainable, indigenous enterprise around the country. Marine leisure will both benefit from and support many other types of rural business. Artisan foods, accommodation, walking and recreational tourism are just a few examples.

Caithfidh mé a luadh gur sheol an rialtas an Clár Forbartha Tuaithe is mó riamh roinnt míonna ó shin. San iomlán idir infheistíocht ón Stát, ón Aontas Eorpach agus ón infheistíocht phríobháideach beidh beagnach €1billiún, nó €1,000 milliun, á chaitheamh ar an bhfiontar tuaithe agus ár aiseanna pobail suas go dtí 2013.

I recently launched the new rural development programme — €425 million of State and European funding. Coupled with local funding, we are unleashing an investment of more than €1 billion that should create 12,000 frontline jobs and many more supporting jobs. In recent years, I have become more and more convinced that marine leisure and rural recreation projects will play a key role in shaping the direction of rural and regional development in Ireland.

For some time, I have been working with my colleagues to see how we can unlock the potential for marine leisure from within existing resources, building on the valuable research done by the Marine Institute in this field. We know that at present, there are more than 5,100 jobs in the sector. If fully developed, would it be fanciful to believe that we could increase this by half again or even double it?

This year is significant in that we will see the Volvo ocean race, which is the Olympics of this type of racing, land in Galway for two weeks. This raises the profile of marine recreation, both nationally and internationally. It gives us an opportunity not only to showcase what we have to offer but also to open our eyes to the possibilities beyond that. It will help us see how we should build and develop our network of infrastructure in partnership with local communities.

Particular emphasis will be placed on the broader area of rural recreation under the new rural development programme. When we consider the continuing urbanisation of Europe and even of our own country, it is clear there are significant opportunities in rural recreation still untapped. We are lucky to have one of the most diverse and beautiful countrysides, relative to our size, of any country, with beautiful mountains, rivers, lakes and a general landscape that largely remains undeveloped in terms of the potential of rural recreation. There is an unparalleled opportunity to develop these assets through the rural recreation policy of my Department and through the Leader programme.

The measures we are taking in co-operation with local communities are being developed to facilitate agreed access to the countryside and the development of rural recreation. All this work is about improving the quality of rural recreation product available to market to overseas visitors and to attract our own communities to avail of the social and economic benefits of rural recreation.

This programme will have a particular focus on the opportunities of indigenous small-scale industry, particularly in the small food sector. Even in the present atmosphere of global economic restraint, the food sector continues to thrive. Today there are an estimated 320 businesses producing artisan and speciality food in Ireland. Together, our producers have a combined turnover of €450 million. That means €450 million in sales value to 320 small and speciality food producers throughout Ireland. Importantly, our sales are growing by at least 12% per annum, reflecting the growing market demand for artisan and speciality food. My Department will continue to provide support for artisan and speciality food production under the new rural development programme 2007-13. Among other things, this funding will support niche speciality food provision, farm shops and farmers' markets.

Decentralisation is playing a key part in the re-energising of many areas of the west. The Budget Statement outlined that we will have completed 6,000 out of 10,000 promised places by 2011. If we had announced 6,000 the first day, it would still have been the largest decentralisation programme ever. Perhaps we overshot somewhat but so be it. We were over-optimistic. Decentralisation is one of the great dynamic drivers in rural Ireland. I do not subscribe that we should have decentralised to the gateway towns because they were growing anyway.

The decentralisation of my Department is going full steam ahead. There are 100 civil servants in Tubbercurry. What is disconcerting is that senior spokespersons in the Opposition run down the decentralisation programme week in, week out. They do not inform themselves that all this decentralisation has taken place and the Departments are working so efficiently in the decentralised locations that people do not realise the move has taken place.

Ba mhaith liom pointe ar leith a dhéanamh maidir leis na hoileáin mhara. I must state my surprise at the view expressed by Senator Doherty in August of last year that the islands off the west coast were being neglected. It is ironic that the one island he visited during his fact-finding tour——

Senator Pearse Doherty: On a point of information, it is not clear that the Minister read the report because this is the second point on which he has made a mistake. I advise him because I know he is genuine on the issue. It would be wrong to say that I visited only one island.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Níor dhúirt mé gur dhúirt an tSeanáadóir sa tuarascáil é, ach dúirt sé sa samhradh é.

Senator Pearse Doherty: No, the Minister must acknowledge I visited other islands. He should also acknowledge that——

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Doherty must allow the Minister to finish.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Glacaim leis go mb'fhéidir go raibh an tSeanáadóir ar oileáin eile.

Senator Pearse Doherty: The growth in population is acknowledged in the first point.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Has Senator Doherty a point of order to make?

Senator Pearse Doherty: That is a point of order.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: That is not a point of order.

Senator Pearse Doherty: I am only trying to help the Minister. I accept his apology.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It is ironic that island is home to the largest island infrastructure project in the State, the €40 million development of the Cill Rónáin pier to facilitate separate areas for the passenger ferries and fishing vessels.

Is mór an peaca freisin nach bhfuair an tSeanáóir an deis dul chomh fada le hInis Meáin, áit a bheadh an ché nua a d'osclaíodh anuraidh le feiceáil ann. Ar ndóigh, tá forbairtí mhóra ar na hoileáin eile ar fad, ina measc, €10 milliún caite ar Inis Bó Finne, €12 milliún caite ar Oileán Chléire, €2 mhilliún ar Inis Tuirc — sin ar chéibheanna, gan trácht ar an iliomad airgid atá caite ar na hoileáin le blianta beaga anuas. Tuigeann an tSeanáóir óna chuairt go bhfuil seirbhísí eitleáin agus bháid chomh riachtanach ar na hoileáin mhara agus atá mórbhealach ar an mórthír. Is bunchloch de pholasaí an Rialtais é do na hoileáin mhara é go mbeadh na seirbhísí iompair sin ar fáil dóibh mar ní morán dul chun cinn a dheanfaí gan an bonneagar no an infreastruchtúr sin.

Mar achoimre, ba mhaith liom a rá go gcuirfidh me spéis sna rudaí a bheas le rá ag na Seanadóirí. Má tá dearmaid sa mhéid atá ráite agam, éistfidh mé go cúramach. Tugann na ráitis seo deis dom smaoinemh a dhéanamh ar na tuairimí ata ag Seanadóirí maidir le forbairt an iarthair.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas a dhéanamh leis an Seanadóir Doherty as an méid oibre atá déanta aige ar an tuarascáil seo agus cuirim fáilte roimh cuid de na moltaí inti. Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire go dtí an Teach chomh maith.

I welcome publication of the report and thank the Leader for allowing us to debate it today. I congratulate Senator Doherty on the work he did in compiling this significant publication and recognise the level of research, time and effort invested in its production. The report demonstrates the strong potential in the regions for development, but in many cases that potential has been ignored. The recommendations made in the report have significant potential and, while I do not agree with all of them, the report is worthy of debate and serious consideration, not just by Government, but by all local and regional authorities in the west. It should be examined by the Minister and his Department when planning a way forward for the regions, which are suffering due to the recession.

The Fine Gael Party has consistently highlighted the need for sustainable development in the regions and I pay tribute to Deputies McGinley and Ring who have been to the forefront in this regard. Deputy McGinley suggested to me that if the money spent on commissioning reports over the years had been spent in the west and north west, we might already have seen some progress.

The Minister touched on many key issues in his remarks, with some of which I agree. Undoubtedly, many challenges face this nation, not least the need to get our spatial strategy right and to have proper balanced regional development. There is an imbalance in the system. For many in government, life ends at the M50 or the N7 and it seems life exists only within that pale for many Members. That is not as it should be.

If we look at the record analytically, we will see there is a haemorrhage or loss of services in rural Ireland and the west, including post offices, banks and health services. Unemployment has changed the face of rural Ireland, particularly in the west. I am aware the Minister referred to an increase in population in the west, but in the heartland of rural Ireland in general there is little life and many areas are bereft of homes and inhabitants.

As Senator Doherty says in his report, we must try to overcome the sense of isolation faced by many people in rural Ireland. I know the Minister is genuine in his philosophy, but people in Gaeltacht regions in the west and in Múscraí feel the pinch and are under pressure; tá siad fé bhrú. We need investment in these areas. We have invested moneys through the Leader,

RAPID and CLÁR programmes, but we need to reprioritise the national development plan and build up our hub and gateway towns and cities and focus on and prioritise job creation. We also need to work more closely with the European Union on funding for research and development.

I agree with the Minister that tourism, agriculture, education, recreation and leisure must be part of the development of rural Ireland and the west. Perhaps the over-dependence on agriculture, fishing and construction for employment in the regions has left us in the position we are in and makes the west vulnerable in this time of economic turmoil and meltdown in the construction industry. Between September 2007 and September 2008, just fewer than 30,000 people in these regions joined the live register, accounting for 38% of all the people who signed on during that period nationwide. The construction industry represented 20% of all men employed in the western region.

The Minister spoke about the development of tourism and recreation. There has been a decline of 30% in tourism in the north west over ten years. In my area of Cork and in west Cork, to which Senator Doherty referred in his report, there has been a reduction in the number of tourists. This is linked in part to the issue of the Cork-Swansea ferry and the lack of support from Government for this service. This has cost the south west region €35 million. I welcome the moves by the people of west Cork to try to reinstate the ferry and I hope they are successful in that regard. An active ferry carried significant volumes of passengers and allowed tourists access to Cork and the south west, the tourism hub of Cork and Killarney, the Beara Peninsula and Dingle.

I referred to the spatial strategy and the hubs and gateway towns and cities. We must develop opportunities for job creation and employment in other sectors apart from agriculture and tourism. Third level graduates coming out of college should be encouraged and incentivised to stay in the regions and help to boost regional economies.

Farming and agriculture have had their difficulties. Farmers' incomes are below the national average and the majority of farmers in the western region are in receipt of the single farm payment. I know fishing is not part of the Minister's brief, but it and associated industries in the maritime area have been decimated in the past decade. The fishing fleet has declined by 30% and, although we have a total of 11% of EU fishing waters, Ireland only has 4% of the EU fishing quota. Irish fishing is in serious decline. Many fishermen in Castletownbere in west Cork will state it does not pay them and there is no incentive. Do we want to leave a legacy of having wiped out a generation of seafarers and fishermen?

In the context of the north west, one of the daftest decisions made by the Government was the VAT increase in the budget in October. Many businesses have closed in the short term and jobs have been lost as a consequence of people going across the Border to Newry or Derry. Even the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment described the VAT increase as a total disaster. Why can it not be reversed? Why can it not be used as an economic stimulus to allow Border counties to prosper and reclaim some of the trade they lost rather than having a trade war with our fellow islanders North of the Border. It would also have the effect of helping to reduce the cost of goods and stimulate consumer spending.

I firmly believe that rural Ireland was and is a great place to be educated. I remember my late grandmother trying to persuade my mother to send me to school in the heart of Kerry in Rathmore or Knocknagree from where my mother came.

Senator Joe O'Toole: Senator Buttimer could have been so lucky.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I could have been so lucky. She felt the quality of education in rural Ireland was better than in the city. My exam results might not have anything to do with that

[Senator Jerry Buttimer.]

but might be a testimony to my lack of studiousness. The school building programme should be used in the regions to help absorb job losses in the construction industry and improve education infrastructure. The school in any parish, be it a two or three teacher school, is at the heart of the community. It does not stand in any way as a proud legacy for any of us that we have schools today in the west and in parts of Cork and Kerry and rural Ireland that are in a state of decline and decay.

It is important we continue to encourage indigenous micro-enterprises as they can play a large part in rural development. However, they need assistance from Government in the context of investment in broadband as this will help to improve our competitiveness in a global environment. Investing in broadband will also help the connectivity and accessibility of our businesses and enterprises for years to come. The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Ryan, has huffed and puffed with regard to broadband but it is time for delivery.

Transport is an issue we should discuss. I know the Government will speak about the vast sums of money invested in roads and infrastructure and this is to be commended. However, its manifesto a few years ago stated, “a lot done, more to do”. We should focus on the “more to do” part. Transport 21 was not scrapped completely in the budget. However, the pause button has been pressed on many of the projects. Phases two and three of the western rail corridor have been pushed back.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: No, they have not.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: According to the Department they have. I look forward to hearing the Minister on this. Bus Éireann is seeking redundancies in many key parts of the country rather than enhancing public transport. We should use the green economy. With regard to health care, questions on the abandonment of the provision of key services in many rural towns, particularly in the west, and cancer services in the north west must be answered. I wanted to discuss the Leader programme but I do not have time.

We need to be more proactive in the development of the west and the regions. After 12 years of Fianna Fáil Government it is quite clear that it lost sight and fell asleep at the wheel. What matter are the people at the coalface and those who build communities? It is not money or the provision of services. I congratulate Senator Doherty on the report. It makes very interesting reading and, in some cases, one could replace the word “west” with “many parts of rural Ireland”. It is worth debate and consideration and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú: Is mian liom fáilte a chur roimh an Aire. Is beag duine ar an oileán seo a bhfuil stádas agus tuiscint an Aire, ar imeachtaí an iarthar agus na tuaithe, aige nó aici. Cuirim fáilte freisin roimh an tuarascáil atá curtha le chéile ag an Seanadóir Doherty. Caithfidh mé a rá go raibh áthas orm bheith ar an gcoiste sin. Cruthaíonn sé fiúntas agus stádas coistí an Oireachtais. Tá obair fairsing agus ilghabhálach, mar shampla ó thaobh taighde de, ar siúl acu.

An image which has stayed with me for many years was “The Late Late Show” on which the late Monsignor Horan appeared with a number of political figures. He was being decried for the amount of money it would cost to build Knock Airport. He stated in a nice way that he was a simple parish priest but he had worked out one sum, which was that the infrastructure to build and sustain one DART carriage in Dublin would cost as much as it would to sustain Knock Airport. The point he was making was that very often people far removed from rural Ireland and the west have a totally different preconception of the place to what it is exactly.

One of the best developments at Government level was the establishment of a specific department for rural affairs. This was most important for the simple reason that it was raised above agriculture and all of the other infrastructural possibilities and progress that could be made with indigenous industries which were not necessarily agriculturally based were dealt with. Often I have heard in a limited way people who do not understand the west or rural Ireland ask that this department be abolished. However, when one considers its track record in specifics, there is no doubt that it has helped to energise and motivate the communities involved. Long may it continue.

I was interested to hear the Minister state that the slowest growth of population was in Munster. Perhaps we need another report on ath-mhúscailt na Mumhan at this stage. The point he was making is that there has been a continuing increase in population and this is what CLÁR is about. It was specifically focused on those areas which may have had declining population to build it as were all of the other aspects which go with it.

With regard to the Minister's opening remarks, we are dealing with a totally different situation in considering this report than we would have been 12 months ago. We are dealing with a national and global recession. We must examine how the huge but appropriate infrastructure funded and placed in the west can benefit from where it is. Many other areas may not be quite as well positioned. The Minister made a number of points which are relevant, including what makes the west special. This is important because there is no doubt about the quality of life there. However, in the context of other aspects of living, such as cultural tourism, there is nothing as attractive or more potent as a policy than being able to portray the best of what one is oneself. I am speaking in terms of a way of life, an attitude and a culture. These are the very things I believe will prove attractive in the future. People will want a change from the humdrum activities of life and they will want to go back to where there is a reasonable pace. Because it is so extreme, severe and devastating, one can never understand the terrible trauma experienced by those who do not have sufficient financial wherewithal or who have lost jobs. We must keep reminding ourselves that our discussion should focus on sustaining and creating jobs. Against this background, I heard several times a comment that seemed a little like a black joke, although I know where it came from: "Good will come of the recession because it will make us stop and think." It will make us reflect on what exactly is quality of life.

I know young working couples who have exceptionally good salaries and jobs and who are trying to rear a family. They are commuting 50 or 60 miles every day, which is an utter nightmare. I have no doubt that these sensitive, educated people must go home at times and ask how they got to where they are and how they embraced the rat race in the manner in which they have done.

Very often, expenditure could very easily be managed in a different way. Youngsters do not always need designer jeans, clothes or shoes. While I admit there are those who do not have the wherewithal to purchase them, I believe that, by way of a philosophy or social concept, we need to revisit our thinking in this regard. The strength of rural Ireland, including the west, is that one can go there and embrace the environment with a minimum amount of money and partake of the finest food for a reasonable price. If one is lucky enough to stay in farmhouse bed and breakfast accommodation, one will have an experience there that is human and special. These are the types of experiences we can create.

I was speaking to some very sophisticated young teachers recently who stated that they go to country markets for organic products and free-range eggs. This is an example of small indigenous industry. If something happens to a big industry, the whole community is saturated with unemployment and there is little opportunity for 90% of the workforce to be re-employed, but there is a much greater possibility that small indigenous industries will survive, owing to

[Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú.]

continuing demand. We need a little more organisation to support these industries because, at times, they, including the country markets, could do with a little help. Those types of industries are vital.

Would it be possible to tweak some of the EU regulations? I am never too sure whether we are being too perfect in our interpretation of them by comparison with other countries.

Senator Joe O'Toole: We are.

Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú: I know for a fact there are aspects of regulations that other countries do not observe. In my area, many housewives who had no jobs outside the home were able to bake apple tarts, scones and cakes. One was delighted to get them and one would fight on one's back to get them. However, EU regulations were imposed on us stipulating, *inter alia*, that one must have steelware in the kitchen. One cannot sell a few eggs at present unless the hens are registered. That is how serious the matter is.

I have in-laws from the farming community whom I used to visit over the years. I used to look at the Rhode Island Reds and I knew there would be fresh eggs in the barn. One must now register hens. While these are only isolated examples, there is too much unnecessary bureaucracy that has absolutely nothing to do with hygiene or health. I remember an episode of "Glenroe" in which Dinny bought eggs in a shop, rubbed them in the dirt in the shed and brought them back and sold them as free-range eggs. It shows one how exaggerated circumstances have become.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Like comely maidens at the crossroads.

Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú: What I am saying about Athmhúscailt an Iarthair, I am saying genuinely. If we are not positive, do not recognise the strengths we have and help the small people to create and sustain jobs, as we have been doing, the bigger infrastructure, which I recognise should be developed, will be of no use.

I compliment Senator Doherty on the broad range of the report. As the Minister, Deputy Ó Cuív, stated, there are only so many aspects that relate to his Department. As a senior member of the Cabinet, he is interested in them and is interacting with other Ministers in respect thereof. I am glad the report has been discussed in the House for two reasons. While I would like to see the Minister here more often — he always comes when he is invited — each time he attends he gives us an insight into the multifaceted nature of his Department. If we keep an ear and an eye open on the ground, we will note the results in every rural community — the results are not centralised in just one community.

I am glad the Gaeltacht was mentioned. I am not too sure how the statistics stand up because I did not research them. I hope they are somewhat better than indicated. When the delegates from Údarás na Gaeltachta and other bodies appeared before the Oireachtas committee, I stated that it is vital to our spiritual well-being as a nation that the language survive as a living language. I also stated that it has considerable economic value. The current interest in linguistics is such that people want to understand our language. It evokes national pride, no matter where one travels in the world, to be able to stand up and speak a bit of Irish. People then know one is Irish, not British or any other nationality.

If we are to get out of our present difficulties and maximise our strengths and potential, the first step we must take is to direct ourselves back to our culture. The Young Irelanders did exactly that when the Famine of the 1840s impressed itself upon us in genocidal proportions. They directed us back to our national characteristics in order first to lift the spirit of the people. Based on this, one can get people to move forward. I feel the same about what is happening

today. Our culture and national characteristics pertaining to sport, language and music give us a sense of pride. We can build on this when engaging in our next phase of development.

Senator Joe O'Toole: Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh an Aire agus roimh an tuarascáil atá curtha thar bhráid an Tí ag an Seanadóir Doherty agus an choiste. Mar a dúirt an Seanadóir Ó Murchú, tá sé thar a bheith tábhachtach go dtuigfimis go bhfuil obair tábhachtach á dhéanamh ag na coistí ar rudaí mar seo. Nuair a chuala mé iriseoir de shaghas éigin ar an raidió le déanaí, bhí ceist na coistí á phlé aige. Dúirt sé nach bhfuil cumhacht acu é seo nó é siúd a dhéanamh. Tá sé tábhachtach go dtugann na coistí deis do ghnáth-daoine a dtuairimí a chur thar bhráid Baill an Oireachtais. Is maith an rud é go mbíonn seans ag na coistí tuarascálacha den tsórt seo a chur thar bhráid na Tithe.

Míneoidh mé an fáth a chuir mé iachall ar Cheannaire an Tí a chinntiú go mbeadh an díospóireacht seo againn. Ró-mhinic sa Teach seo, dírimid ar deacrachtaí timpeallachta ar leith a bhaineann le Dáilcheantar ar leith. An rud tábhachtach faoin díospóireacht seo ná go bhfuilimid ag féachaint ar an réigiún ar fad. Tá sé sin thar a bheith tábhachtach. Dá mbeadh guth amháin ag iarthar na tíre, braithim go ndéanfaí i bhfad níos mó ar son an taobh sin den tír. Ba mhaith liom sampla a thabhairt ó thaobh bóithre de. Nuair a bhí cinneadh le déanamh ag an National Roads Authority cúpla bliain ó shin maidir le ciorraithe — bhí ar an údarás feachtais áirithe a chur ar leataobh ar feadh bliain nó dhó — b'iad na bóithre a bhí ag dul i dtreo an iarthair a chuireadh chun deiridh. Tarlaíonn sé sin i gcónaí. Tá an ceart ag an Aire nuair a deireann sé go bhfuil an caighdeán maireachtála nó pé rud a ghlaoitear air san iarthar thar barr agus is deacair é a shárú in aon tslí. Nuair a fhéachann tú ar iarthar na tíre agus ar imeall fharraige agus ar imeall Atlantach na tíre seo, is dócha gur féidir a rá go bhfuil an t-aer féin, an fharraige féin agus meon na ndaoine agus draíocht ar leith a bhaineann leis an áit sin agus tá siad sin thar a bheith tábhachtach. Ach, ag féachaint ar na rudaí sin, táim ag iarraidh é seo a mholadh agus díriú isteach ar seo mar shampla de rud nach bhfuil ag tarlú agus nílim ag cur seo ar bhráid an Tí mar aon sórt gearán ach deirtear in san rud a chuir an tAire amach chugainn “for some time I have been working with my colleagues to see how we can unlock the potential for marine leisure within existing resource”. I ndáiríre tá seans i ndiaidh seans i gcónaí chun é sin a dhéanamh. Ansin luann sé mar gheall ar an Volvo Ocean Race ag teacht go dtí na Gaillimhe ar feadh coicís amach anseo. Is maith is cuimhin liom an tseachtain deireanach i Mí Bealtaine agus an chéad seachtain i Mí an Mheitheamh. Bhí mé in Aukland, New Zealand i 2002 nuair a tháinig an Volvo race isteach agus tá an ceart agat, it is a huge event ach an bhfuil fhios agat na daoine go bhfuil suim acu san rud sin, is daoine iad a bhfuil suim acu i rudaí cosúil le seoltóireacht, bádóireacht agus rudaí mar sin san fharraige?

Bhí an plean náisiúnta ag na Rialtas seo deich mbliain ó shin agus bhí mar cheann des na aidhmeanna an uair sin ná go mbeadh, agus is cuimhin an frása a bhí ann, “a necklace of marinas along the west coast of Ireland”. Cad a tharla? Is féidir leat dul i mbáid ó chathair Chorcaigh go Cionn tSáile go hOileán Béara go Cathair Saidhbhín go dtí Daingean Uí Chúis isteach go dtí bá Thrá Lí ansin go dtí Kilrush and that is where it stops. Cén fáth? Ba chóir go mbeadh marina chomh maith in Dúlainn i mBaile Uí Bheacáin. Tá ceann á thógáil i dháilcheantar an tAire áit éigin in aice le cathair na Gaillimhe ach ba chóir go mbeadh ceann chomh maith in oileán Árainn amach anseo sa Chlochán agus ar fud na tíre. Is cuimhin liom cúig bliana ó shin bhí mé ag féachaint timpeall an Fhóid Dubh i nGaeltacht Mhaigh Eo agus do bhí fógra pleanála ansin seeking permission for the erection of a marina agus bhí an-áthas orm é sin a fheiceáil mar bhí sé ana gharr do Oileán Acaill agus bheadh sé ana oiriúnach ansin do dhaoine. Bhí mé ansin bliain ó shin agus ní raibh aon dul chun cinn déanta. It does not take huge money. Floating moorings are not that expensive ach an deacracht atá ann tá deis anois ann á chailliúint againn i mbliana when you could have hundreds of boats. People will come from France agus gach bliain is féidir a bheith cinnte, gan amhras chonaic an tAire féin iad sa

[Senator Joe O'Toole.]

Daingean, agus ón mBreatain agus ó áiteanna eile agus timpeall na tíre agus ní théann siad níos faide ó thuaidh. An deacracht i gcónaí a bhaineann le iarthar na tíre seo ná bhfuil an t-infreastruchtúr i gcónaí dírithe i dtreo Baile Átha Cliath. An rud is tábhachtaí ná go mbeadh infreastruchtúr ann ag dul ó tuaisceart go deisceart agus visa versa. Sin an tábhachtach ar leith a bhaineann leis an mbóthar nua sin ó Sligeach síos tríd Gaillimh agus tríd Luimneach go dtí Corcaigh, the Atlantic highway nó pé rud a glaoitear air. Sin an fáth chomh maith agus sin rud atá luaite ag an tSeanadóir Pearce Doherty cúpla uair roimhe seo go bhfuil tábhacht ar leith ag baint leis an iarnród. The Minister you mentioned that it was going from Ennis to Athenry. Is dóigh liom i ndáiríre go bhfuil sé ag dul ó Luimneach go dtí Baile Átha an Rí ach an deacracht atá ann ná, go mba chóir go mbeadh sé ag dul, amach anseo, níos faide ná Clár Chlainne Mhuiris go dtí Sligeach agus ó Shligeach go dtí Leitir Ceanainn agus Doire. Dá mba rud é go raibh an toil pholaitiúil ann chun é sin a chur chun cinn, bheadh sé thar a bheith tábhachtach. Ní féidir liom smaoineamh ar aon rud níos tábhachtaí ná iarthar na tíre a oscailt. An rud eile is tábhachtaí, rud atá curtha chun cinn cúpla uair ag an Seanadóir Mark MacSharry, nach bhfuil ollscoil san taobh sin tíre sa phoblacht ar aon nós agus ba chóir go mbeadh sé sin ann chomh maith. Ba chóir go mbeadh, gan amhras, seans ag daoine a gcuid oideachas ar fad a bheith acu timpeall a n-áit dúchais féin. Tá sé sa tuarascáil nach mbíonn ró-sheans ag céimithe fostaíocht a fháil timpeall a n-áit dúchais féin agus is mór an trua sin. Cén fáth go bhfuil an deacracht sin ann? Ceann des na deacrachtaí is mó a bhaineann leis sin ná ganntanas infreas-tuchtúr, mar shampla broadband. Níl an banda leathan ar fáil in a lán áiteanna.

Is cuimhin liom labhairt anseo deich mbliain ó shin agus dúirt mé nár chreid mé riamh nach dtabharfadh Eircom príobháidithe an banda leathan riamh go dtí Béal an Mhuirthead. Gan amhras sin mar a tharla chomh maith. Sampla eile, ag féachaint ar an infreastruchtúr gáis, is mór an trua i measc na deacrachtaí ar leith a bhí acu i Mhaigh Eo mar gheall ar an gás, nár cuireadh an choinníoll a thabhairt siar isteach do Ghaeltacht Mhaigh Eo chun go mbeadh sé sin acu ann mar sórt buntáiste éigin tar éis an achrann ar fad, atá acu, a bhí acu agus atá fós ar siúl ann.

Dhéan an tAire tagairt ar an tábhacht ar leith a bhaineann leis an t-aigéan Atlantach agus ó thaobh a bhaineann leis, gan amhras an rud ba chóir go dtarlódh ansin is that we should be doing special development of renewable energy resources a bhaineann leis an aigéan go mór mhór fuinneamh tonnta, fuinneamh taoide agus gan amhras fuinneamh gaoithe. Is é seo an rud is tábhachtaí go chóir go ndéanfaí trí “the urgent infrastructural legislation”. Ba chóir go mbeadh aon dul chun cinn mar sin fast tracked tríd an córas pleanála nua mar tá sé thar a bheith tábhachtach do mhuintir an iarthair go mbeadh an sórt sin rud ann.

Luaigh an tSeanadóir Labhrás Ó Murchú an tábhacht ar leith a bhaineann le feirmeoireacht glas nó tionsclaíocht glas agus tá an-seans chun é sin a dhéanamh in iarthar na tíre. Mar gheall ar gur oileán sin, tá an-seans againn dul chun cinn a dhéanamh. Mar gheall ar an rud a dúirt an Seanadóir Labhrás Ó Murchú mar gheall ar chúrsaí bia agus an tionsclaíocht atá bainteach leo agus na coinníollacha a bhaineann leo, tuigeann gach aon duine an tábhacht a bhaineann le, go mbeadh coinníollacha seachas ceadú a thabhairt do dhaoine. If you are producing half a million sandwiches a day, gan amhras is cinnte gur cóir go mbeadh coinníollacha ar leith ag baint leis sin ach an deacracht, agus tá sé chomh simplí leis seo mar fhreagra don cheist a chur an Seanadóir Labhras Ó Murchú, má tá an duine i sráid bhaile nach bhfuil ach ag cur le chéile 100 nó abair 20 dosaen de cheapairí in aghaidh an lae, bíonn air nó uirthi na coinníollacha céanna a chomhlíonadh is a bhíonn ag an tionscal mór. That is the difference, agus mar gheall ar sin ní bhíonn an dara seans ag aon sórt cottage industry, aon sórt tionsclaíocht beag nó micro-tionsclaíocht. Ní gá go mbeadh sé mar sin, ní tharlaíonn sé sin sa Fhrainc agus ní ceart agus ní gá an milleán a chur ar an Eoraip mar gheall ar sin mar baineann sé sin linn féin na

coinníollacha nó na cinneadh atá tógtha againn féin anseo. Mar gheall ar sin, ag féachaint siar ar na marinas arís, tá dul chun cinn agus is fíor don tAire, agus chonaic mé an dul chun cinn atá déanta ó thaobh céanna agus cuain timpeall iarthair na tíre and I certainly will not argue against that. Ach tá dul chun cinn níos mó ná marinas a chur, floating moorings atá thar a bheith tábhachtach mar a lán des na báid tá a lán airgid curtha isteach acu agus bíonn siad ag féachaint cén sórt cosaint a bheadh ann dos na báid agus tá sé sin tábhachtach.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator has one minute remaining.

Senator Joe O'Toole: Chun críochnú — leaving out three quarters of the speech I was going to make — is dócha gurb é infreastruchtúr ar nós bóithre agus leathanbhanda an rud is tábhachtaí domsa. Tá gá le leathanbhanda chun seans a thabhairt do dhaoine tionsclaíocht agus fostaíocht a chur chun cinn ina áiteanna dhúchais fhéin. Táimid ag brath ar sin, fiú amháin ó thaobh turasóireacht de. Tugann a lán daoine an oifig leo nuair a théann siad ar saoire. Bíonn díoma orthu muna bhfuil 3G ar fáil ar a fón póca, nó muna féidir leo an laptop a úsáid, san áit ina bhfuil siad. Téann sé sin i gcoinne an áit. Is féidir linn a lán rudaí beaga a dhéanamh.

Impím ar an Aire gur chóir go mbeadh díospóireacht go minic, sa Teach seo nó sa Teach eile, ar an iarthar an fad, seachas dailcheantair, áiteanna beaga, scéimeanna beaga agus feachtais beaga. It is hugely important to have a wide-ranging debate on the west of Ireland chun go mbeidh tuiscint ag muintir an iarthar go bhfuilimid ann dóibh agus go bhfuilimid sásta iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar na deacrachtaí ar leith a bhaineann le dul chun cinn agus forbairt réigiúnach. Braithim go bhfuil tús maith déanta againn leis an bhfeachtas seo agus an tuarascáil seo. Molaim go mór iad. Ba chóir dúinn feachtas a chur ar bun chun moltaí na tuarascála a scrúdú and to seek to have them implemented in any way we can. We should take something from them, make them work and make them real.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a chur in iúl don Seanadóir Ó Docharthaigh agus déanaim comhghairdeas leis as an tuarascáil seo a tharraingt le chéile. Bhí mé ag léamh na tuarascála le cupla lá anuas, ach ní raibh deis agam í uilig a léamh. Aontaím le go leor de na pointí atá pléite inti agus creidim go bhfuil an Seanadóir ag iarraidh tuairimí pobail na ceantair sin a chur chun tosaí. Déanann sé tagairt do lear rudaí a bhaineann le ceantair an iarthair, ó Dhún na nGall go Contae Ciarraí, a chuireann isteach ar na pobail ata ina conaí sna ceantair sin. Mar Chonallach, tá lúcháir orm go bhfuil an tuarascáil seo curtha le chéile agus os comhair an choiste.

Má fhéachann muid ar an phictiúr iomlán, tá tagairt déanta sa tuarascáil don ísliú ar an daonra iomlán sna ceantair, ó 1926 go 2002. Ar ndóigh, bhí daoine ag fágáil na ceantair sin de bhrí nach raibh na deiseanna acu agus a bhí ag daoine ina cónaí in áiteanna eile sa tír. Tá aithne mhaith againn uilig ar an t-am a d'fhág daoine muinteartha linn iarthar na hÉireann. D'imigh siad go Baile Átha Cliath, Béal Feirste nó go Corcaigh nó thar lear go Sasana, Albain nó na Stáit Aontaithe chun jabanna a fháil dóibh féin agus chun airgid a chur abhaile. Go minic, bhí na teaghlaigh a bhí fágtha ag braith ar an airgead a bhí ag teacht abhaile le fear an phoist go dtí na ceantair sin. Bhí sin amhlaidh i gceantair Dún na nGall sna blianta sin.

Tá lúcháir orm go bhfuil an Aire anseo inniu. Creidim go láidir san obair atá déanta aige, go háirithe ó 1997 nuair a thosnaigh sé amach mar Aire Stáit sa Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta. Chonaic sé go raibh deacrachtaí ann agus go raibh pobail na Gaeltachtaí agus iarthar na hÉireann ag lorg cuidithe. Thug sé cuidiú do na ceantair sin tríd an obair a ndearna sé leis an scéim CLÁR a thabhairt isteach sa bhliain 2002 agus an réamh obair a ndearnadh roimhe sin. Chuidigh sin le cuid de na fadhbanna a luaitear sa tuarascáil a athrú sa mhéid go raibh tacaíocht ar fáil do cheantair nach raibh tacaíocht ar fáil dóibh roimhe sin. Chuidigh sin

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le misneach a thabhairt do dhaoine teacht abhaile agus jab a fháil dóibh féin agus clanna a thabhairt ar ais go dtí na ceantair tuaithe.

Tá lúcháir orm go bhfuil na figiúirí ag athrú anois. Mar a dúirt an Aire i dtaobh an daonáire-amh i 2006, tá athrú ar na figiúirí agus ar an daonra atá ag teacht abhaile. Tuigim féin agus tuireann an Seanadóir Ó Dochartaigh, má amharcann duine ar áit cosúil le hOileán Arainn Mhór, i nGaeltacht Thír Chonaill, tá go leor teaghlaigh óga atá beo ar an oileán, daoine a bhí ag obair i Londain, i Meiriceá nó in Albain, a tháinig abhaile agus thug siad a chlann leo. Fiú an bainisteoir atá i gceannas ar an chomharchumann ansin ar an oileán, is duine í a tháinig abhaile. Ta cáilíochtaí aici, tá Gaeilge aici agus tá sí ag cur na Gaeilge chun cinn ar an oileán. Creidim gur cuid é sin den deá-obair a bhí déanta de thairbhe an phacáiste a chuir an tAire le chéile faoin teideal CLÁR.

Mar a dúirt an tAire, tá tacaíocht de dhíth ar na réigiúin. Tá clár forbairt tuaithe beartaithe agus €1 milliún geallta ag an Rialtas anois. Gabhaim buíochas don Aire as an obair a rinne sé chun an t-airgead sin a tharraingt anuas agus a chinntiú. Beidh níos mó ná €400 milliún ar fáil faoin scéim Leader suas go dtí 2013. Bhí mé ag ocaíd inné sa dailcheantar ina bhfuil mé féin i mo chónaí taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht agus bhí duine ansin a bhí ag obair i gceann de na comhlachtaí páirtnéireachta ag cur in iúl do ghrúpa pobail go bhfuil scéim agus deontais ansin agus go dtiocfadh leis na daoine sin cur isteach ar na deontais chun hallaí a thógáil nó gnóthaí beaga a fhorbairt. Sin scéim nach raibh ann go dtí an bhliain seo; cé go raibh an t-airgead ar fáil, ní raibh sé chomh fairsing agus atá molta faoin scéim Leader úr.

Sa tuarascáil, tagraítear do na bóithre agus rochtain ar na réigiúin. Tá sin tábhachtach agus aontaím go gcaithfidimid a chinntiú go mbeidh rochtain againn. Tá na haerfoirt réigiúnacha an-tábhachtach, i gCiarraí, i nGaillimh, i Sligeach agus i dTír Chonaill. Tá sé tábhachtach go mbeidh ceangaltas ón Rialtas go leanfar leis an tacaíocht a thabhairt do na haerfoirt réigiúnacha agus go mbeidh infheistíocht déanta iontu. Creidim go bhfuil gá le breish infheistíochta in aerfort Thír Chonaill.

The report highlighted that access to the regions and broadband availability are vital. Eircom is rolling out and upgrading exchanges under the national broadband scheme. The Government has made a commitment to deliver the scheme within 21 months and it must be ensured that happens. If there are anomalies and shortfalls in the scheme, they must be addressed in order that broadband is available everywhere.

Senator Doherty acknowledged in the report the need for a cross-Border or combined university in the north west and I agree totally with that proposal. Under the Minister's leadership, third and fourth level education is being provided in Gaeltacht areas such as in Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gallimh's base in Gweedore, Donegal. It is a marvellous development and this initiative must be developed further. I agree with the cross-Border proposal where, perhaps, the University of Ulster could link up with Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gallimh or the Letterkenny Institute of Technology. It would bring a cross-Border element to third level education.

From speaking to teachers and lecturers in the North and as someone who attended college there, I know its university structure is focused eastwards towards Belfast, not Derry, Coleraine or Omagh. We must assist the people in the North by pulling the focus towards the north west. Perhaps Letterkenny or Gaoth Dobhair could be the centre. I hope that ministerial co-operation will bring this about.

Mar fhocal scoir, tá súil agam go mbeimid in ann roinnt de na moltaí atá déanta anseo a úsáid. Ní aontaím leis na moltaí uilig ach measaim go bhfuil obair déanta anseo atá fiúntach. Rud ar bith a chuidíonn leis na réigiúin, ba chóir dúinn uilig a bheith ag comhoibriú le chéile

chun é a chur i bhfeidhm. Má chuideoidh moltaí atá agam nó ag an Seanadóir Ó Dochartaigh nó ag an Aire nó ag duine ar bith eile le jobanna a chruthú sna réigiúin le daoine a choinneáil ansin, ba chóir dúinn uilig i gcónaí a bheith ag comhoibriú le chéile leis an áit a dhéanamh níos fearr do na glúine atá le teacht. Mar sin, measaim gur céim chun tosaigh é seo agus oibreoidh uilig le chéile le cuid de na spriocanna sin a bhaint amach. Tá mé cinnte ó bheith ag éisteacht leis an Aire go mbeidh seisean ag déanamh sin agus buíochas dósan as an obair atá déanta aige chun an taoide a thiontú. Tá dóchas láidir agam anois, leis an méid obair atá déanta le roinnt blianta, go bhfuil na réigiúin lárnach san aisling atá ag an Rialtas don toadhcháí. Maidir leis an airgead atá á chaitheamh, sin sprioc atá á bhaint amach, mar atá soiléir san NDP go dtí 2013.

Senator Dominic Hannigan: I welcome the Minister to the House and commend Senator Doherty for the significant amount of work and commitment that has gone into the recent report on awakening the west. It is clear, concise, realistic and full of recommendations that would make a considerable impact if enacted. I am pleased to be able to debate some of the issues. Rather than dealing with all of the issues, many of which have been addressed by other Senators, I will concentrate on two specific areas, namely, community empowerment and access to quality broadband.

Rural communities, particularly those in the west, will probably not spend much time lamenting the death of the Celtic tiger. Evidence of the economic boom was thin on the ground in rural communities across the country and, now that the depth of our economic crisis is apparent, we can evaluate the rural landscape after a decade of transitory wealth. Some of the main features of that landscape are widespread rural unemployment, as high as 40% in parts of County Mayo, underdeveloped infrastructure, not just roads and rail, which have been mentioned, but broadband, water and sewerage, widespread social exclusion and pitiful levels of digital infrastructure. As stated in Senator Doherty's report, broadband access is as low as 13% in parts of the western region.

Despite the problems and challenges faced by rural communities, there remains hope and opportunity concerning the development of sustainable economic and social structures. Last year, the *Community Development Journal* published an article called "Development in the West of Ireland: Twenty Years on in the Killala Area." The area is representative of small communities in the west. It suffered through the economic ruin of the 1980s as well as more prosperous times from the late 1990s to the present. As stated by one contributor to the article, "the Tiger must have drowned in the Shannon River, because he never made it here".

Despite difficult economic conditions, Killala fought the tide and made considerable advances through the empowerment of the Killala Community Council, KCC. There are many similar councils across the country, but the KCC is notable for its success and advocacy efforts. The model is rooted in the concept of community empowerment, training and planning. Council meetings are held on a monthly basis and are open to all residents in the area. The council employs a full-time office manager and a development officer to ensure the council's relevance on a day-to-day basis.

The council had considerable success in terms of developments for the community. For example, it has lobbied for business start-ups in the area, purchased land for lease to entrepreneurs, built new facilities for the fishing industry, lobbied to expand the port, established a local transport service and health centre and facilitated numerous social and leisure activities to bring the community together.

Like the rest of the country, Killala will face an unprecedented set of challenges in the difficult years ahead. However, the town has set a useful precedent for survival and community empowerment. The model can be easily replicated across the country. If we fail to empower

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local communities, more of them will wither on the vine in the coming decades. As it is, many towns and villages in the west are barely getting by, kept alive by declining levels of local employment and European Union grants. Community empowerment represents the best chance for reactivating the west and encouraging sustainability, self-sufficiency and economic viability.

I want to highlight the issue of rural broadband. It is an absolute disgrace that, in 2009, only 13% of households in the western region have access to broadband. It is particularly irritating to listen to the Tánaiste's latest collection of stock phrases, including the smart economy, knowledge society and innovation economy, when the vast majority of residents in her own county, as Senator Doherty will well know, are being forced to consider a basic amenity as some kind of luxury. Broadband is used by everyone in the east, but the west should also have access to it.

In this context, the national broadband scheme is obviously welcome and I recognise its general merit and the good intentions behind it. Despite recognising the scheme as a step in the right direction, I have considerable concerns about its impact on broadband attainment in the west and in rural Ireland. Specifically, I refer to concerns raised in an evaluation report from Irish Rural Link, IRL. In the report, IRL highlights the absolute stupidity of focusing predominantly on mobile broadband. According to ComReg, mobile broadband is only suitable in a number of circumstances, those being, for people and businesses that do not require a high-end broadband service and for those who are not heavy Internet users.

Is it just me or do these two points raise alarm bells about the scope of the scheme? Are rural communities not entitled to a "high-end service"? Similarly, who decided that rural users are not heavy Internet users? In my constituency, which has rural areas, I know of householders and businesses on the fringes of commuter towns that are not too far from Dublin, such as Dunshaughlin and Ratoath, that bought mobile broadband packages only to find that their connections were essentially useless.

The report also challenges the assertion that the scheme will lead to 100% broadband access across Ireland. However, 100% geographical coverage is not related to quality or speed in connection. The scheme guarantees that households and businesses will be able to access a broadband connection, but provides no guarantee on the speed or quality of that connection. I want the Minister to revert to the House to clarify these points. Rolling out a national broadband scheme is wonderful, but it is in danger of becoming a piecemeal solution unless we can clarify these points.

I congratulate Senator Doherty on this fantastic and worthwhile report, on which it is clear he spent much time and effort. It is representative of his commitment to rural communities and I hope it will open a debate on the challenges faced by rural communities as we face into an extended period of economic contraction.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: I welcome this debate on the west. It would be almost impossible to get the pertinent issues across in just seven minutes, but the Minister is not only *au fait* with issues pertaining to the west, but is more interested in finding solutions than problems. I do not mind if I sound patronising, but Deputy Ó Cuív, of all the Ministers to whom I bring issues, is always more interested in and challenged by solutions. Usually, a solution is reached.

I commend the Minister regarding CLÁR. A basic scheme involving a small number of departmental people, its implications across the country have been so considerable that the levels of jealousy in undesignated areas are phenomenal.

That is a point in the Minister's favour. When I considered my contribution to this debate on the west, some obvious issues came to mind and when I heard the Minister speaking, two of them collided. The first was that although we live on an island that is surrounded by water, we have done nothing to develop opportunities on the water. Although recreational tourism is in place and there are bigger opportunities in respect of inshore fishing, seven or eight Ministries are responsible for the marine. I heard the Minister speak recently, I believe it was at the launch of the boat show, on trying to find a solution to this problem. Moreover, I also spoke about this issue to the Minister of State with responsibility for fisheries and forestry, Deputy Killeen, when he visited Greencastle recently. All elements with responsibility for the marine must gather around one table to identify the sticking points to such opportunities, as solutions will never be found until there is agreement on what are the issues. I refer to issues such as mutual recognition of boat sizes and regulations between North and South, as well as many other licensing issues. In my locality, many people have lost opportunities in the whitefish sector because of changing European directives and in the inshore fleet, for example, arising from the loss of the salmon fisheries, other than those who still are licensed by the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. Consequently, although some people in the area wish to try something else, if they are fishing there is a sense that at other times, when their boat is free of fishing gear, they are not allowed to engage in marine tourism activities.

Small measures that require the tweaking of legislation and some of which will not involve expenditure, will give opportunities to people. Some people discern opportunities within the marine sector and consequently seek to avail of them exclusively. However, marine leisure and tourism is based around bulk and the people are beginning to understand this. They do not want to see a single fisherman involved in marine tourism but want Inishowen to be the centre for marine leisure. Moreover, they seek the requisite infrastructure. To be fair, most of the infrastructure already is present although a certain element still is required. However, a drive to overcome the barriers pertaining to licensing is lacking. Opportunities in this regard exist with the Leader programme. I refer to the difficulties associated with manufacturing operations moving out, beginning with Fruit of the Loom. Simply put, while the opportunities are visible, they should be driven forward and the Minister has stated he concurs.

I wish to bounce another point off the Minister because the other issue to which he alluded pertained to rural recreation. It has annoyed me for a considerable time that although I live on a peninsula that is alive with historical monuments, such as locations from which famous people have come, we seem to duck this. For a time it was ducked because some such localities were political. For example, although General Montgomery of Alamein lived in Moville between the ages of three to 15, one was not allowed to talk about Monty or such issues. Nevertheless, why do we not exploit the English tourists who wish to come and see where Monty grew up or to see where his parents were buried? I will declare my interest by noting this took place 200 yards from my home. I acknowledge he did not return to attend either parent's funeral. A couple of miles away lies the estate of Captain Cochrane, on whose career I believe Russell Crowe's recent film, "The Whistleblower", is based. I also refer to Leon Uris's novel, *Trinity*. There are oceans of information and opportunity for what one might call cultural or recreational tourism.

I also refer to simple things like the castle at Greencastle. Were it lit up in a similar manner to some other abbeys and castles and with some signage, people using the car ferry coming across the Foyle would see it as an attraction rather than something that happens to emerge from the mist, as happens at present. Again, this involves minor, rather than major sums. Sometimes when the State gets involved, those who own such properties seek their pound of flesh. However, I hope that era has passed, given the changed economic circumstances, and

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that people will realise that such initiatives are driven by working together in partnership as a community, local authority or development group, which often is possible in such situations.

The Minister stated we have lovely hills, mountains, rivers, lakes and landscapes. However, the point about historical fact and the people who were there——

An Cathaoirleach: One minute of the Senator's time remains.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: For example, Florence Nightingale's nursemaid is buried in Fahan on the Swilly, from which the Flight of the Earls took place. I could take up an hour recounting the locations of importance in my area. However, I refer to the RTE programme, "Nation-wide". RTE has resources and people are interested in watching such matters. There should be co-operation with RTE to make more documentaries, even if only to archive material. For example, General Montgomery's son is still alive, although he is relatively old, and his grandson remains. We should ensure that the elderly people in the area who still remember Lady Montgomery are documented. While I am not here as an advocate for Montgomery, my point is this constitutes an opportunity for tourism. The west has many opportunities, through tourism, that as yet are completely unexploited.

While I could have raised many other issues, I would rather concentrate on a couple. In the 30 seconds that remain to me, I will refer to holiday home rates.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator has fewer than 30 seconds.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: It was argued that rates accruing from holiday homes should be centralised in order that every county would get a fair share, because not every county contains holiday homes. This suggestion may no longer be the case but if so, the Minister should advocate the same arrangement in respect of rates on commercial businesses because many counties do not have businesses.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator should conclude.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: If such rates were to be collected centrally and then shared out, people in County Donegal would be more than happy to take their fair share of national rates. Perhaps this is the way in which we should go forward.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I welcome the Minister. As we are from the same county, he should be intimately familiar with all the issues I intend to raise. I compliment Senator Doherty on putting the west on the agenda. It was time this was done.

In the early 1990s, I returned from the United States, having lived there for four years. I saw an advertisement in the paper asking whether one wished to live in the west for the rest of one's life. I answered that advertisement in the affirmative. The Minister will recall the Save the West campaign by the western bishops and will recall a great man called Pól Ó Foighil and his attempts to bypass central Government and to bring funds from Europe directly to the regions and to the west in particular. I answered that advertisement and became part of his group to achieve that goal. Members now know that what he was trying to do was correct and in many ways the Government has taken on much of his vision. As that was my first foray into the political world, I wish to note his achievement and his work in that regard.

The west is a great place to live. It has natural resources that any country would envy, as well as the human resources. However, it lacks the infrastructure. It has its communities and we must continue to empower them to want to live there, to be able to stay there and do business there. This is the reason the question of infrastructure is so critical and I wish to touch

briefly on roads, rail, air, broadband, energy and environment. I have much to achieve within a few minutes.

I will begin by considering the west's desirability as a place to live. The Minister will be aware the Western Development Commission recently carried out a survey in respect of the Look West campaign, in which it emerged as one of the top places to which people wanted to move. However, in respect of infrastructure, the west has been the last to get everything. The N6 is not built yet, although it is under way. The N18, which links Limerick to Galway, has now stopped and I understand the work between Gort and Oranmore is suspended.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: No, it is not.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: What about the funding?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It is all there. The great news is that it is being extended all the way to Tuam in one big jump.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I am glad to hear it.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It also is going past Tuam. The Tuam bypass will continue beyond Tuam. The Senator does not listen to me on Galway Bay FM.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Healy Eames, please.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I hear it when the Minister is there. Perhaps the Minister can give me better news in respect of the outer city bypass, which is something of a joke.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Again, it is going ahead.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: Half of the outer city bypass is approved but the other half is suspended.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The first is approved and the other is proceeding to planning. We cannot answer for An Bord Pleanála.

An Cathaoirleach: There should be no questions to the Minister. The Minister will reply later.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I am trying to speak. The issue is that we have two arms of the State.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: An Bord Pleanála can defend it.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: We have planning and the national parks and wildlife service. The Minister knows how much work was done in bringing that application to the planning stage, only for the national parks and wildlife service to knock it.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: An Bord Pleanála knocked it.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: Something needs to be done about that. While the infrastructure is eventually on its way to Galway city, it basically links the city southwards as opposed to northwards into the entire region. The Atlantic corridor is to be upgraded to motorway status from Letterkenny all the way to Limerick. However, there is no sign that it will happen faster as a result. I would like to hear the Minister's progress on that. Road infrastructure is a critical factor in the cost of business. A major employer in County Mayo, which I will not name, needs to pay an additional €400,000 to insure the transport of its product to ports in one

[Senator Fidelma Healy Eames.]

piece owing to the state of the road between Charlestown and Longford. That is a big factor in attracting jobs to the west. It would be great if the Minister had good news for me on the Claregalway bypass.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Yes. Done.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: Very good. It is a political hot potato with people being misled. It is mentioned in the programme for Government.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Senator has misled them. I was the only one who went to Claregalway and told the people how it would happen, and it is happening exactly as I said it would happen.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I would like the Minister to document that in the text of his answer. I do not want to lose all my time because the good Cathaoirleach might just cut me off.

I am delighted the western rail corridor is proceeding. I understand the link between Ennis and Athenry will be open by August.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Again, an objector from Gort was involved. Otherwise the project would have been completed by May.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I am delighted to see that happening. However, the project needs to be kept going because until the western rail corridor runs to Sligo the region will not have the full benefits. While I know the Minister supports it, we do not want to see the funding in any way jeopardised. Can the Minister tell me when the Oranmore rail station will be open? I cannot count the calls I have received on the matter. The Minister knows I live in the town, but I know he also has an interest in it.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator has one and a half minutes of her time left. I am reminding her a bit early.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: We need improvements on the interurban rail services. For example, the Galway to Dublin service was supposed to be an hourly service to allow people to put in a full business day in Dublin. For a trip from Galway to Wexford, for example, the only option is five hours by car, which is not good enough.

Air connections from the west to international destinations are critical. Shannon Airport has been allowed to be downgraded over time. Regional airports are at risk. The PSO will be critical after 2011 to maintain connectivity. What commitment will the Government make in that regard? There are major safety issues for regional airports. They eat up between one third and half of their budgets, as I know from having been on the board of Galway Airport.

Broadband is required, like the air we breathe, for business and leisure. It is very patchy and could solve the disadvantage and isolation of the area so that it would be just as attractive to do business in Bohola as in Ballsbridge. Some 25% of the rural areas in the region have no broadband access. The national broadband scheme proposes to roll out 1 gigabit, but that is only a fraction of what is needed. Business needs 10 gigabits. How can we be truly competitive without this?

As I lost much of my speaking time, I would like the Cathaoirleach to be generous with me on this point.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator's time is up now.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: In eastern Germany GPs are getting older and they are not being replaced. Instead telecommunications are being used to diagnose and treat people, and network them into centres of excellence via broadband and television monitors in order to link to the medical expertise and records. This is a solution we could use here but we are not doing it.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator's time has concluded. My hands are tied.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: First, we need the vision and, second, we need the broadband infrastructure. Let us consider the debate about BreastCheck, which does not cover people north of the Dublin to Galway line.

An Cathaoirleach: I call Senator Doherty.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I am disappointed to put on record that——

An Cathaoirleach: My hands are tied. The time was ordered at seven minutes.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I thank the Cathaoirleach for his indulgence. I would like to say, because of the toing and froing, I have probably lost two minutes.

An Cathaoirleach: I must be strict on time.

Senator Pearse Doherty: Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire go dtí an Seanad. Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil sé i ndáiríre mar a dúirt mé faoi go leor uaireanta anseo sa Seanad maidir le cúrsaí an iarthair. The Minister is very passionate about the west. I need to take him to task on a few matters. First, he is factually incorrect in stating that I only visited one island off the west coast during compilation of the report. I do not know where he is getting his information.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I take it back. Ar phointe eolais, dúirt daoine ar chúpla oileán eile gur thug an Seanadóir cuairt orthu.

Senator Pearse Doherty: I have very little time. The other thing is——

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It is like naming——

Senator Pearse Doherty: If the Minister names the golden circle, I will name the islands. I visited Cléire, if I can refer to the west coast of Cork. The Minister argued that the report does not point out that the population of every county along the west increased between 2002 and 2006. I will read from the report:

The total population of the Western region reached 762,335 in 2006. This was an increase of 57,187 people since 2002... All counties on the western coast saw increases in their population, with counties such as Kerry increasing from 132,527 to 139,835.

I am not sure whether the Minister or his officials have read the report, which is disappointing. This is not about me, the Minister or the Government — the report is bigger than all of us — it is about a vision for the west of Ireland that requires us to work together. I was somewhat disappointed with the Minister's tone. He knew the information and how we got into and out of the islands. Obviously, some of this stuff was factually misrepresented. I am sure it was not deliberate on the Minister's behalf.

This report comes about as a result of meeting groups across the west coast. I have had the privilege of meeting people who have been working at the coalface of communities in trying to overcome the difficulties they face every day. While the report deals with some of the

[Senator Pearse Doherty.]

difficulties, it also deals with some of the successes. The Minister mentioned that I did not acknowledge the infrastructure developments in the west. I acknowledge the infrastructure investment, particularly in islands. I stated: "In spite of increases in public expenditure and improvements to infrastructure, the population of the Islands continues to decline." The report does not call for an investment in infrastructure. I called for a continued investment in infrastructure. I tried to deliver a fair and balanced report. I do not know that it is possible to argue with any factual point it contains. Most of the information came from departmental officials whom I met in drawing up the report.

I thank all the Senators who spoke. I believe all of them commended me on the report, with the exception of Senator Keaveney. I particularly commend Senators O'Toole and Ó Murchú who called for this debate in the first instance. I wish to deal with some of the issues I raised in the report. We need structural reform in terms of the west. We can all look at wee projects. I do not want to put the Minister on the spot because that is not what the report is about. It is not about what will happen to a particular road or project, it is about a bigger vision, and we need to consider the ways to deal with it.

A regional impact assessment guaranteed in law exists, for example, in the Six Counties under section 75 of the Equality Act. It should be tailored here to deal with the regions which means that if policies were developed that would negatively affect the regions there would be an onus on Departments to address those policies. This is something that previous Ministers of this Government support. We need that type of structural reform to ensure that balanced regional development is central to any Government decision. We also need a review of the national development plan. Regional development is not a central part of the national development plan and it needs to be.

I uncovered a number of areas while compiling the report. For example, some targets that were set in the past no longer exist. We need to reintroduce targets. I will not wave the target around and tell the Minister that he did not meet the target. We must focus the minds of opinion makers and policy developers so that they examine the west as an area central to policy decision, not as an afterthought. Targets for tourism spend must be identified. We cannot have a situation where the combined tourism spend in 2006 in Leitrim and Roscommon amounts to less than 1%. This is intolerable. We must have target spends for the regions and sub-regions and we must have targets for job creation figures for those regions. We see that 8.1% of IDA companies and jobs went to the majority of the western counties such as Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Clare and Limerick. That is not acceptable.

We must increase our graduate placements and support our universities and institutes of technology in respect of research and development. The report identifies the lack of funding going to the west. The majority of the 10% funding spent on research and development goes to Galway. Other institutes of technology and third level institutions are negatively affected. The problem for the future of the west is the brain drain. Some 38% of graduates from the west can find employment in their home counties, compared to the national average of just under 80%. We all know that is a problem and we must address it.

There are positive aspects to this report, which is not just about identifying the problems. Identifying the solutions is the most difficult aspect of a report such as this. In doing so, I have examined international best practice and what Commissioner Danuta Hübner calls the top ten of regional development. This is contained within the report and unfortunately I do not have the time to go into them.

There is imbalance in Government spending. Of the 19 national road projects completed in 2007, only two were in the west. The only major public transport infrastructure project, which

the Minister supports, the western rail corridor, requires €200 million to finish the job. Metro north will cost €3.7 billion. Which one is under threat at this point? Which one does the media, commentators and political opinion makers target? They target the project in the west and not the Dublin project. That is what this report is about, creating a counterbalance, asking for a fair share, and the Minister and I, along with every boy and girl, man and woman in the west, every community organisation, business group, trade union official and people working in the public sector standing together to say this is what we need for the future of the west.

We must acknowledge the advances made in the Minister's Department. The Minister is genuine in his sincerity with regard to the needs of the west but more can be done. We cannot sit on our hands and say this is what we have done so far. We must have a bigger vision for the future.

There was heavy dependence on construction, agriculture and fishing in the west, which are in decline. The west will be in a worse position to recover from the economic recession unless we invest and create tools and support for a strong region to bounce back.

Senator Feargal Quinn: I welcome the Minister and Senator Doherty's report. When I was seven years of age my party piece was "The West's Awake". It is a smashing song and I remember it well. I was impressed by the words Senator Doherty used in the report. The purpose of the report is to identify these social and economic needs of the west and to bring forward proposals for redevelopment. There appears to be a belief that the Government can do everything. We must solve the problems of the west and the problems of Ireland by doing it ourselves. We must lift ourselves up by our bootstraps, with the help of the Government. I met Elaine Chao, Secretary of Labor in the Bush Administration, who is a bright young woman. She was the first Asian in the Cabinet in the US. Her job was to ensure that jobs would be created but she said that it was not her job to create jobs. Rather, it was her job to create the environment so that others could create jobs. One may say this is a Republican view but it is the truth. We will not succeed if we expect someone else to make the jobs for us. We will succeed if we make the jobs here. It is our task in this House and the Minister's task in Government to create the environment where jobs and enterprise can blossom and grow.

On too many occasions, I have attended meetings, such as partnership meetings, where we sought to create jobs. This was not necessarily in the west, which I do not know as well. I went to the meetings with loads of ideas about various matters and discovered that the majority of those at the meeting wanted to send a deputation to Dublin to get the Government to do something for us. We must get out of that mindset.

I remember an occasion in the west when our youngsters were babies. We stayed in Glenbeigh, Kerry. There was a lovely restaurant called Ernie's, which is no longer there. I remember deciding to go out on horseback because someone had laid on horses for us to ride. We needed someone to mind the baby and we found a babysitter. The babysitter would not accept payment because the parish priest had said that the country, the parish and the county were having a difficult time and that people wanted to encourage tourists. For this reason, they were not going to accept payment and it was clear that there was a commitment in the parish and the county to solve the problem themselves and not ask someone else to do it.

If I have a criticism of the report, it is that we are almost expecting someone else to do something for us. Senator Doherty will say this is not the point but there is some degree of this mindset in the report. I found it startling that in 2007 just 8.1% of the 9,216 new IDA-supported jobs were located in counties Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Clare, Limerick or Kerry while Galway or Cork accounted for 21% of these new jobs. These were concentrated on the gateway towns of Galway and Cork. I welcome the proposal to support smaller, indigenous companies.

[Senator Feargal Quinn.]

The report found that grants made available by county enterprise boards are based on a model that is 15 years out of date. If that is correct — if we are relying on figures 15 years out of date — the grants system must be updated urgently, as recommended, so it is more supportive of local businesses and that the grants will suit the businesses rather than having businesses adapt their models to suit the grants.

There are a number of essential proposals such as the western rail corridor, which is critical to the development of the west. This is the only major inter-regional rail project for the western counties in Transport 21. It is under threat due to Government cutbacks. We do not have enough money to do everything we would like to do. It seems unwise not to go ahead with that project, given that it would cost less than €200 million. It is lovely to throw out this figure as it means nothing but I compare it to the metro north project in Dublin, which is estimated to cost €3.7 billion. The former project should not be subject to cutbacks in the same way and it should proceed as planned. It is critical infrastructure that is essential if we are to create business in the area.

Some eight or nine years ago I was in Singapore, a country that wanted to be the hub of the Internet society. Everyone in Singapore had an e-mail address and everyone was getting broadband. Broadband is mentioned in the report and it is fundamental that broadband is rolled out in rural areas for job creation. There is a continuing lack of this critical infrastructure but it is capable of being provided.

I wish to draw attention to another report, by Irish Rural Link, which argues that even though the Government has announced a new broadband scheme, it will not deliver 100% coverage and has serious technical limitations in respect of liability and capacity. The report is entitled *The good, the bad & the inadequate*. It says the broadband scheme will not provide the quality of connection needed by rural businesses to trade online. The report shows that 12,000 homes and business premises in areas not covered by the scheme cannot get broadband. We have referred to this today and I am confident the Minister's heart is in the right place. There must be a greater emphasis on high-speed fibre-optic networks rather than using mobile phone masts to supply broadband. Owing to the expected delays that will arise relating to planning permission for the telecom masts for the broadband scheme, the Government's forecast for the roll-out of broadband in the west is probably unrealistic. Has the Government any sort of back-up plan for when the inevitable delays will come about owing to planning permission objections against those masts?

I am delighted the Minister has given attention to the matter and I am pleased we have had this debate today. The matter needs concentration of effort and serious attention. One time when the Minister was in the House I quoted the seanfhocal I can remember from my school-days, “Éist le fuaim na habhann agus gheobhaidh tú bradán”, or: “Listen to the sound of the river and you will catch the salmon.” It is possible to achieve a great deal if we listen to the needs which exist. We should put our hearts behind the idea that the people must do it for themselves. The enthusiasm and commitment is there and all that is needed is support from us.

Senator Paddy Burke: I congratulate Senator Doherty on producing this report and acknowledge the tremendous amount of hard work he put into it. I welcome the opportunity to say a few words on rural decline and the west in particular. I welcome the Minister, Deputy Ó Cuív, to the House and congratulate him on doing a very fine job as Minister in his Department. I know he is fully committed in everything he does but in regard to the west, he is not getting any help from his colleagues.

In his speech the Minister stated:

In terms of developing the west, I trust we can all agree on the fundamental point that the western region is intrinsically a good place to live. In any initiative to develop the west we never fall short of that measurement of quality of life.

One would wonder what that means. Does it mean the quality of life is so good in the west of Ireland that we should leave the people as they are? That would seem to be the way County Mayo has been treated, especially over the past ten years.

The Minister has met deputations from various businesses in County Mayo, including Allergan Pharmaceuticals, Baxter, Hollister and Coca Cola with regard to rail and road transport links into County Mayo. These businesses are all big employers, with more than 1,000 employees in most of them. They have very fine plants and have been very fine employers for many years in our county. They will leave our county, leading to worse than what has happened in Limerick, because of the state of the freight rail and road links in County Mayo.

These companies have been complaining about this matter for the past number of years and this is coupled with one of the highest electricity charges in Europe as well as water and sewerage costs. In County Mayo our water and sewerage costs are among the highest in the country because local authorities have very few ways of raising funds. They use water and sewerage charges as the new rates to raise funds and keep services going within the local authority area. These businesses are under pressure from infrastructure needs and rising costs. The Minister and the Government must consider the matter carefully and give it the attention it deserves.

The Minister mentioned decentralisation, indicating that he was delighted it did not go to the gateways. Taking the rural guidelines as outlined by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, there are hub towns such as Castlebar, Ballina, Tuam and others. The rural planning guidelines laid down by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government indicate the hub towns must grow at the cost of the other towns.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Senator should read the national spatial strategy.

Senator Paddy Burke: I was at the committee where the Minister spoke on this and one can see what the Minister has put in place in the Mayo county development plan.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The matter is clear.

Senator Paddy Burke: In the Mayo county development plan, the Minister has indicated that the hub towns must grow to the detriment of other towns such as Ballinrobe, Charlestown and Claremorris.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The national spatial strategy is the issue.

Senator Paddy Burke: I am only giving my reading of our county development plan.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The mistake made in Mayo was that nobody read the spatial strategy.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Burke, without interruption.

Senator Paddy Burke: The Minister can read what the Minister for the Environment has put in place in our county development plan.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: There will be no change in Government policy.

Senator Paddy Burke: The hub towns are to grow to the detriment of the others.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: No.

Senator Paddy Burke: The councillors must take this into consideration when formulating a plan for the hub towns. They can only grant zoning to the other towns——

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The relevant part is section 3.5 on page 51 of the spatial strategy. It is all there.

Senator Paddy Burke: I beg to differ with the Minister so it makes a mockery of what he has said with regard to the gateways and hub towns.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I will read it out later.

Senator Paddy Burke: There are many agencies which have failed the west, such as the tourist board. A number of years ago the tourist board promoted golf on a broad basis. Since Padraig Harrington became the star he has grown to be in winning three majors, the tourist board seems to have stopped advertising golf in this country. Since the Ryder Cup was held here in 2006, very little advertising has been done by Bord Fáilte to attract people to golf in Ireland and to learn to play the game in our links and parkland courses where one of the greatest golfers in the world has learned to play. I cannot figure out why that is the case. Along the western seaboard we have some of the finest links courses in the world but they are not being promoted properly by our tourist board. Much more could be done.

With regard to fishing, we have the greatest lakes and rivers in the west and we are lacking in our promotion of those areas. Senator O'Toole mentioned the rail link from Limerick to Sligo, and this line should surely be extended to Sligo and up to Donegal and Derry so we can have a rail link around the country. Spain is economically similar to us and since 1992, it has had intercity fast rail linking every city in Spain. Every city is also linked by dual carriageway or motorway as well. They have made great use of the money they got from Europe but apparently we have not done the same over the same time. Perhaps it was easier for them to build a fast rail link. We do not have any fast rail line in this country and although we have upgraded our rail links, we do not have the high-speed lines seen in other countries. I do not know the reason for this but we have fallen short in many things.

From the perspective of those in the west and County Mayo in particular, we have fallen short in our transport links and infrastructure into the county and the region. That bears out exactly what the Minister said in his speech. My interpretation of it is that perhaps those regions are just as well to be left where they are.

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I take exception to the Senator's final remark because I am one of the few people who can say they went to the west to create jobs and stuck at it when times were tough.

Senator Paddy Burke: I said at the outset I was not blaming the Minister but he was not getting help from his colleagues.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The point I made is one that I stick to. Going around the west I see two types of community. One is always waiting for the solution to come from the outside and the other is getting on with the job and selling its area in a positive way. The communities which succeed are those which recognise the infrastructural deficits that exist — I know all about them — but which also know their strengths and advantages and play to their strengths while addressing the infrastructural deficits that always take longer to solve. The community, on the other hand, which says it cannot do anything until we sort out all the problems of the world are literally dying.

It is interesting to compare different attitudes to development in different parts of my constituency. I could compare the attitude of communities in Mayo and question why some areas succeed and some do not. I can think of an extremely rural parish in mid Mayo whose members have used their own resources, supported by the State grants, to progress a series of community developments. They did so because they had the get up and go to do it. That is the key point I am making. It is ridiculous to think one will attract people to invest in an area that one continually runs down. We hear talk about the IDA not setting up factories in the region but some people run down the region.

I accept there are major challenges in the region and I will deal with a number of them. I heard what Members said about the national broadband scheme. My preference would be to have broadband down the line, which is an attractive option. If we were to bid for such provision, the incumbent would have the advantage. There is a plus and minus to putting the national broadband scheme out to tender on that basis. Through the delivery of the scheme, I hope we will prove something I have believed from the beginning, namely, that the percentage take-up of broadband and the band width that would be used would far surpass what the experts predicted. Given the high level of education in rural Ireland and the distances involved, broadband connectivity is the much more attractive option. If we could put in place basic broadband provision, demand — as we found with mobile phone systems — would far exceed the provision and it would naturally grow from the base level. Therefore, the problem we faced was to ensure the first service was delivered, and we are doing that. I will give the times for such delivery. Half of the scheme will be delivered by the end of this year and the remainder will be delivered by September 2010. I accept there are small gaps in the way the scheme has been rolled out. There are areas that were mapped to have a service with which we will have to deal. However, we must be honest and acknowledge that in terms of access to broadband, the position will be much better in September 2010 and much better even by December this year.

I wish to clarify that the target for the development of the western rail corridor to Tuam is 2011 and to Claremorris is 2014. We purposely allocated such time for such development. There are major forces in the establishment in Dublin — I am not referring to politicians — who believe this development is a waste of time, that very few passengers will travel on that route and that the trains that travel throughout the countryside on that route will be empty. I have seen the documentation produced for this development. When all the information is gathered and a cost benefit analysis is carried out, we tend to be on a loser with such projects. However, this is the way the system works. We are told to carry out such studies before proceeding with projects. In politics or in business, one needs a combination of a good gut instinct and a good study of a proposal. Having a study of a proposal without having the courage to implement it will not get one anywhere.

I agree with what Senator O'Toole said about the development of marine leisure activities. We do need to develop this area. That is the area to which I was referring and we also need to develop surfing and other such activities. I am committed to moving forward this agenda. Regardless of what area one wants to develop in this or any other country, responsibility for it is divided across various agencies. The best approach is to ensure the agencies involved work together and not on every such occasion to try to re-organise all the agencies of the State. That would take too long and often such an approach does not solve the problem. My approach to dealing with agencies is to work in line with the *status quo* as far as possible and to make the best of it.

The west is not badly served in terms of third level institutes. It has two universities, one in Limerick and one in Galway. When we talk about the west, it tends to be a floating agenda. Senator Doherty picked me up on what I said about rural depopulation, but he said, *níl sé ag tabhairt fé bhuanú na tuaithe, laistigh den iarthar bhí gluaiseacht suntasach daoine, idir pobal*

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

tuaithe agus ionaid oibreacha, de réir mar a aistarraingíodh seirbhísí éigeantacha. That is stated in his summary. Are we talking about the west——

Senator Pearse Doherty: The Minister's point about my not acknowledging the increase in 2002 to 2006 is mentioned in the first paragraph of the report.

An Cathaoirleach: Allow the Minister to conclude.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: This is one of the problems that arises in this debate. It is a problem the Western Development Commission faces. Are we talking about the west as a geographic region? If we are, we are talking about Limerick city and Galway city, if we describe the west as covering the area from Donegal to Kerry. If we are, then parts of the region are growth areas, including Galway city. We must recognise that the west has an urban infrastructure as well as a rural infrastructure. If we are talking about rural Ireland, that would also include rural Wicklow. We must decide on the region before we have this debate. I make this point because often this aspect of the debate is foggy. A person may say nothing happens in the west and that there is no proper infrastructure in place, but if one responds that a motorway is being built as far as Limerick and Galway, the person will say that is not the west and that the motorway is not been built as far as Blacksod. We must decide what we are talking about in this debate before we can talk about a plan. Even though I would argue with some aspects of his report, Senator Doherty tried to examine the west as a region. We must acknowledge that urban areas are part of the west.

I was engaged in constituency work recently and a proposal was put forward for the building of a major windfarm that will not even be located on land. People seem to have big problems and are objecting. They have a legitimate right to do so and I respect that. Every time it is proposed to build a wind farm to harness wind energy, which would involve lines running overground, while people in the west do not really object to anything, they will want to put all cables underground or will come up with some solution that is not practical as it would involve a cost factor of ten times the proposed solution. I know of objections to the provision of a 110 kVA electricity generation project into Gweedore in Senator Doherty's county. I have seen objections to such a project in Connemara. If we are serious about developing the west, we have to accept we cannot have development without the laying of cables to carry the energy harnessed from natural resources to supply the whole country. We must have a reasonable debate as to what is our vision of the west and whether the people of the west really want the inconvenience of all these infrastructural developments. In my experience of development, we cannot have development without the putting in place of such infrastructure.

I was involved in the setting up of a timber mill, which subsequently became a very large mill. Approximately 600,000 tonnes of timber are transported from the mill, having regard to the timber that is brought to it and transported from it. I have to hand it to the people in my rural community, which is in an extremely rural area, who said they wanted the 200 jobs that would arise from this business and they would never say naught against the 600,000 tonnes of timber transported in the trucks to and from the mill. They asked for better roads and they were built, but the people never objected to such development. We must foster that type of spirit, as objections pose a major challenge to development.

I agree with community empowerment — that aspect was mentioned. If the Celtic tiger had never visited rural Ireland, we would not have a downturn in the economy, but it visited every part of this country, including the islands. Every public servant in this country got the same wage rises that were buoyed up by the Celtic tiger. Private sector wages rose in all the regions

and that created its own challenges. Glib comments have been made that we need to further debate.

Senator Doherty raised the debate beyond the usual rural debate about the closing of post offices. It is mentioned in the report but I am serious in saying that I am glad the debate did not descend to defending a past that is killing itself because young people will not use post offices. The Senator addressed the issue not on a parochial level but on a much bigger level. I liked his approach. However, I warn against a number of things. I heard the Senator talk of the Minister with responsibility for regional development and so on. We need to tease out what is the function of that person. Does he or she have total control over education or health? In other words, is he or she a mini-government? The State is organised on this sectional system. It is something we have to examine. I am very worried about regional impact statements and regional impact assessments. We carry out rural proofing. However, I know what happens to all such documents. Somebody is given the task of writing the document and will give whatever answer is wanted to justify that every region has been looked after. The Senator knows that and I know that, and we have seen thousands of these documents written. I would rather work my politics dynamically and in the hustle and bustle, because when many of these documents are published people do not have time to read them.

I am not very interested in proofing. There are many types of proofing, such as gender-proofing, rural-proofing and others. I know what happens. Everyone writes the memo in the same way they would have written it anyway, and at the bottom of it there are questions to be answered. If something has some positive impact on rural Ireland, it will be included and if it does not, it will state that, but it does not change anything.

I am not trying to criticise the Senator. I am trying to speak from my side of the table. I do not find those types of exercises very useful. We need to develop a positive vision of what we want to do. In that context, the debate on the IDA was interesting. I have long come to the conclusion that the IDA is not the answer to the problems in the west. I am not
6 o'clock sure I would welcome a multinational company coming to many areas in the west and providing 300 or 400 jobs. In many cases, in particular the IDA-type jobs which were brought into more rural parts, the policy is “easy come, easy go”. My belief is that the development of industry would be better done by organisations such as Enterprise Ireland, where jobs are created by people such as ourselves in Leader-type programmes.

As a Minister, I have found again and again that in the Gaeltacht the industries which stay through good and bad times and which have durability were all indigenous. They had a reason for being where they were and stuck it out during the bad times because it was the only place they could be and they had nowhere else to go. When awards were given last year for the top industries in the Gaeltacht, only one non-national company was involved. All of the other successful industries in the Gaeltacht, an area which is much more industrialised than the equivalent rural areas outside the Gaeltacht, were indigenous and used natural resources or the intellectual resources of the owner. The owner was there because he or she was from the area or wanted to be there and would not go anywhere else.

We should have another debate in the House on a proper development and enterprise strategy for the west. I am probably over my time.

An Cathaoirleach: I ask the Minister of State to conclude.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: One interesting statistic on this issue is that in many rural areas 70% of young people go to university or third level and a very high percentage are going on to fourth

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level. In fact, the level is totally disproportionate compared to Dublin where, I understand, the average is approximately 40%.

They get jobs in companies such as Intel and in the IT and biotechnology sectors, and work in multinational companies or go abroad. They are as well-qualified in their own expert fields as anybody in the world. This cohort is a major resource. The downturn is very serious but there are always possibilities. One such possibility is that people from, for example, Mayo, Donegal, Kerry or wherever, who have been working very happily in a multinational at the top of the cutting edge will be made redundant, be given a lump sum and will then start thinking about their lives.

Why would one leave a job when one has a job? When people's lives change, they often start looking at the wider picture and might say to themselves, "I could do this on my own". They think perhaps they could set up a factory or industry and are as well-qualified as anybody else or all the employers they have had, and now that they have no employer, rather than sit at home they could set up a business. We must start seeing if there is a major pool of human resources, which we initially went abroad to look for and which may be available to us now, and see if the downturn has created a situation where there is resource under our eyes that we are not looking for.

I wish to clarify a number of issues for Senator Healy Eames.

An Cathaoirleach: The matter must be related. We are over time.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Regarding the N18, the Limerick tunnel and the road to Gort will be completed next year. The road to Tuam will be built as a PPP to, I have been told, all the way to the north of Tuam, which will provide a continuous motorway the whole way from the south of Limerick city——

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: What about Gort to Oranmore?

An Cathaoirleach: Allow the Minister of State to conclude.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The road from Gort to north Tuam is being built in one section and not two, as was previously intended. That is going ahead as a PPP and those involved are very confident they will get the money.

Regarding the bypass, the Senator knows the reality of the situation, which is that An Bord Pleanála turned down the application. I have read its report and am still convinced that no matter how the NRA approached the situation, there would have been a two-step process. Three quarters of it has been sanctioned and the CPOs and archaeological work are going ahead. We are looking again at the final piece of the project, which would link the coast road.

I have worked for many years with Father Micheál McGréil and the committee on the western rail corridor. I do not believe it was possible to get it to Sligo in one jump. People were convinced the programme we laid out was the optimum that was practically available at the time. The whole secret of the way we approached the issue was that if we opened a section of the western rail corridor, it would deliver the next section all the way to Sligo, because once the usage exceeded what was predicted, it would drive the sections north of Claremorris. That is the objective and is the reason my Department was going to Charlestown and is why we are developing Knock Airport.

There is a big picture. I am bitterly disappointed that Fine Gael is constantly decrying the decentralisation programme because it is part of opening the western rail corridor and is one of the drivers of opening it. We can have it one way or another, but we cannot have it every way.

The Cathaoirleach has been very indulgent. I want to say a word about Shannon.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: What about the Claregalway bypass?

An Cathaoirleach: We have gone over time.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Claregalway bypass, as Senator Healy Eames knows, is part of the——

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: The N17.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: ——Gort to Tuam road that is going ahead next year, as I predicted it would. A relief road within Claregalway received money this year for planning, and I predicted that was the way it would proceed.

Regarding Shannon, I remember being on the radio when Aer Lingus made its decision. There was, understandably, a lot of outcry in Shannon. I kept saying it had happened and Aer Lingus at that point would not change its mind and that we needed to get on with it and move on to the next agenda. I am delighted that CityJet is now basing its jets in Shannon Airport. I remember speaking on a programme and being rubbished for suggesting those in Shannon should look at Charles de Gaulle Airport. They did so, and now Aer Lingus has returned and CityJet, which has routes to Charles de Gaulle Airport, has come to Shannon. It goes back to my view of development. If there is a problem, people should not whinge or cry about it. They should look at the opportunities in the problem and get on with the job.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: The return of Aer Lingus to Shannon Airport happened by accident.

An Cathaoirleach: We have gone over time and I ask the Minister of State to conclude.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It did not, it was to do with Government.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank the Minister of State. When is it proposed to sit again?

Acting Leader (Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú): Ag 10.30 a.m. maidin amárach.

Adjournment Matters.

School Staffing.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I welcome the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science, Deputy Seán Haughey. I wish to ask the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O’Keeffe, to review the unique staffing position at Claddaghduff national school in north Connemara. This three-teacher rural school has been informed it will lose one teacher from September 2009 as a result of being one pupil short, a situation arising from the revised pupil-teacher ratios. It is a desperate situation for a school to go from three teachers to two teachers.

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On 30 September 2008, Claddaghduff national school had a total of 48 children on the roll, the exact number needed to retain its three teachers. As the Minister of State knows, the staffing schedule for next year will be determined by the number of children in place in September 2008. However, the Minister, in his wisdom, changed the capitation number to 49 children when he increased the pupil-teacher ratio and backdated that to be effective from 30 September last. As a result of the goalposts moving, the school stands to lose a teacher. A letter was received to that effect on 13 February last advising that Ms Eileen O'Malley will be lost to the school and will have to go onto a panel for a new position at another school as it becomes available.

In 2007, Claddaghduff national school was completely revamped and rebuilt at a cost of approximately €300,000, much of which was granted by the Department. The children moved back into the school in September 2007 and have been enjoying these facilities since then. The parents' association was very proactive, and still is, in fundraising for extra curricular activities and all the teaching staff are dedicated and hardworking.

It seems one of these new classrooms will lie empty and the children will be divided between the two remaining teachers. That means four classes per teacher. As an educator, I know that is a huge drop in educational input into the children, that is, to have four classes and four years of an age cohort per teacher when they are used to three teachers. The school may be short one pupil for the year ending 30 September 2008 but the projected figures for future years show numbers will be maintained in or around 50 plus.

Given the drop in pupil numbers by one, the school will lose a teacher for one year but it may be in a position to get a teacher back within a year or two. Can the Minister of State do something for this school in these circumstances? It is worth noting the school is a designated disadvantaged school but it seems grants and major funding are going to urban schools at this time and that this rural school is being left out in the cold.

A parent stated:

It is difficult enough to think that our children will have to leave their homeplace in search of work in other parts of the country in future years but to think that they are now being deprived of a teacher by such "a callous turn of events", a "U- turn" call it what you want — we feel this is grossly unfair.

The parents have asked me to relay this issue to the Minister and to put it to him that there must be some way in which an exception can be made on the grounds the school had the correct number of pupils on the original date, 30 September 2008.

Claddaghduff national school is the only one in the whole of north-west Connemara to be in this position of losing a full-time, permanent teacher. Having taught in a rural school — a four-teacher rural school — which was reduced to a three-teacher school when I was redeployed through the panel, I know the loss this is to the community and to the children. There is great concern that it may never get the teacher back if the Minister who puts buildings before pupils and teachers continues with these cuts in what one would call the real relationship builder between the teacher and the pupil. Can the Minister of State intervene so this teacher will be kept? I look forward to his response.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): I am taking this matter on behalf of the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, and I thank the Senator for raising it.

The 2009 budget required difficult choices to be made across all areas of public expenditure. These decisions were made to control public expenditure and to ensure sustainability in the long run. In this respect, education, while protected to a much greater extent than most other areas of public expenditure, could not be totally spared. The various impacts at school level were included in the budget day announcements. Even with the budget measures in place, there will still be a significantly increased borrowing requirement in 2009.

The Minister fully accepts these decisions are not of themselves desirable and that they can only be justified by the imperative of securing the future economic stability of the country. The Minister has called for co-operation from all the education partners in meeting the challenges facing us both as an education community and as a country.

The staffing schedule for the 2009-10 school year, primary circular 0002/2009, has been published on my Department's website at www.education.ie and my officials have written to all schools to notify them in this regard. The schedule is a transparent and clear way to ensure schools are treated consistently and fairly and know where they stand. Under a system that allocates additional teachers at different step points under a common schedule, it is a fact of life that one single pupil change in enrolment can cause a school to lose or gain a teacher. In recent years, when improvements were being made to the staffing schedule, it was also the case that there were winners and losers depending on individual enrolment profiles. If the staffing schedule was changed to allow the schools that are due to lose a teacher to retain that teaching post, the Minister would be treating them differently from other schools with the exact same number on the rolls and he does not propose to do so.

The Minister has a responsibility to ensure that whatever the overall level of allocation, the system for allocating teachers to schools is transparent and fair where everyone knows where they stand and each school knows it is getting the same number of mainstream class teachers as the school up the road with similar enrolment. The system should not create anomalies or operate on the basis that one or more schools should be treated differently to others.

The allocation process includes appellate mechanisms under which schools can appeal against the allocation due to them under the staffing schedule. The final allocation to a school is also a function of the operation of the redeployment panels which provide for the retention of a teacher in an existing school if a new post is not available within the agreed terms of the scheme. I thank the Senator for providing me with the opportunity to address the House on this matter and to outline the current position.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: May I ask supplementary question?

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: One question.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: On the basis of this school being disadvantaged and of it expecting 50 plus pupils within a year or two, are there grounds on which we can argue that Claddaghduff national school should retain this teacher?

Deputy Seán Haughey: It is open to the school to make an appeal. However, it would be unwise for me to give any further advice in regard to such an appeal at this stage.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I thank the Minister of State.

Garda Deployment.

Senator Pearse Doherty: Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire. This matter follows on from a spate of crime which has hit County Donegal for a number of weeks, and I will give some details in

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regard to what has happened. I call for additional gardaí to be deployed, in particular to man some of the rural Garda stations which, most of the time, are only open for three hours during the day and for a limited number of hours at weekends, if all.

I expect the Minister of State will read out statistics on how many extra gardaí have been put on patrol and on the increase in the number of gardaí in County Donegal and will talk about the Border and the fact the threat no longer exists. I am not interested, so he can skip all of that and get straight to the point of how many extra gardaí the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform will deploy in County Donegal.

A couple of weeks ago, a person wearing a balaclava attempted to rob a young lad working in a petrol station in my home town. He put a knife to his throat. When the owners of the facility tried to telephone the gardaí, there was nobody in their local station. When they tried to phone the next local station, there was nobody there either. They were unable to get anybody in either station for two hours and the phones were not diverted to the next manned station, Glenties. The following week, in a part of Donegal a few miles over the road, another petrol station was robbed and again, violence was used. The young lad working in that station told his friend to run up to the Garda station, but it was not open. When the owner of the premises phoned Glenties Garda station, which is permanently manned, the garda on duty told him she was working on her own and would have to phone him back. This is the problem facing us.

There have not been just two incidents. There has been a spate of incidents throughout the county. Three petrol stations in a ten-mile radius in my area were hit over the past three weeks by violent crime. People running businesses are afraid they will be attacked. I know these incidents do not only happen in Donegal, but we are not as used to them as places where such incidents have been occurring for years. The problem is that people feel their businesses are vulnerable and isolated.

In the residential area there have also been problems. There has been a spate of house robberies in estates such as St. Johnston's. There have been tiger kidnappings where people have been kidnapped and forced to go to ATM machines or business premises to withdraw cash. In Inishowen, there have been 15 break-ins of residential homes since 3 February. The situation is so bad that people are now patrolling the area themselves. It has been reported in the local papers that sales from the local co-op of pick-axes or any tools with a shaft have increased dramatically.

It is very important we support the Garda in the effort to deal with the spate of crime and that we give confidence back to the community that gardaí are best placed, able and capable of dealing with it. We must deal with the isolation and vulnerability felt by both the business and residential communities of Donegal.

If the Minister of State does not have a good message for me, will he ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform whether there is any possibility of an increase in Garda numbers in Donegal? I ask in particular that Garda stations that are currently only open for three hours each morning be opened full-time.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I propose to use the time allocated to give the background to this issue. I am taking this Adjournment debate on behalf of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The Minister has been informed by the Garda Commissioner that as of 31 January 2009, the personnel strength of the Donegal division was 485. The divisional strength is augmented by

the resources available to regional and national units, such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda national drugs unit, CAB etc., as and when required.

It is the responsibility of the Garda divisional officer to allocate personnel within his or her division. Notwithstanding this, the level of Garda personnel assigned throughout the country, together with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy, is continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures optimum use is made of Garda resources and the best possible Garda service is provided to the general public.

Significant numbers of additional personnel have been allocated to the division in recent times, including a unit of the divisional traffic corps based in Buncrana and the establishment of a rural community policing initiative for the Inishowen Peninsula. A divisional crime manager has also been appointed to assist in the monitoring and analysis of crime trends in conjunction with the divisional officer and divisional detective inspector in order to prepare specific initiatives and operations to target specific crime types. Additional civilian support staff have also been assigned to the division, releasing members of the Garda Síochána for patrolling and other duties within the division.

The Minister has been assured by the Commissioner that local Garda management, through ongoing monitoring and analysis of crime trends, is aware of the issues being raised by the Senator and the increase in crime recorded in the Donegal division, compared with the same period in 2008. While no persons have been made amenable, to date, for these specific incidents, they remain under active investigation by the Garda Síochána.

The divisional officer has put the following measures in place to prevent, reduce and detect such incidents: additional patrols by uniform and plain-clothes personnel of the area; redeployment of resources, to assist in the identification of suspected offenders for these offences; the dissemination of crime prevention advice to the local community using local media, including radio and newspapers; and local senior Garda management will meet representatives of the local communities to apprise them of ongoing efforts and initiatives targeting this type of criminality, including appealing to the community to report any information on suspicious activity occurring in the area to the Garda Síochána.

Given the geographical location of this Garda division, there are significant levels of ongoing cross-Border co-operation with the Police Service of Northern Ireland in identifying crime trends and possible suspected offenders for crimes in both jurisdictions. Border superintendents attend bi-monthly crime meetings in Enniskillen and at Garda headquarters. At local level, cross-Border crime meetings are held on a monthly basis with regular, sometimes daily, interactions regarding individual incidents and other criminal activity.

The Minister wishes to assure the Deputy that both he and the Garda authorities are committed to providing the resources necessary to tackle crime in Donegal and elsewhere. The allocation of personnel by the Commissioner is determined by a number of factors, including population, crime trends and as the policing needs of each division dictate. As already pointed out, the level of Garda personnel assigned throughout the country, together with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy, are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures Garda resources are used in the most effective way possible.

It is the responsibility of the Garda Commissioner to allocate personnel throughout the force taking everything into account. The situation in the Donegal division will be kept under review.

Senator Pearse Doherty: I appreciate the Minister of State's response and welcome the fact the Minister is committed to providing the resources necessary to tackle crime in Donegal and

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elsewhere. I know Deputy Haughey may not have the information at his fingertips, but will he ask the Minister to let me know when the next review in terms of resources available to the Donegal division will take place? Given that in 14 days in Inishowen there were 15 break-ins, there is a need to address the situation, even if only on a temporary basis. Hopefully, this spate of crime will end shortly, but we need some effort made to address it in the immediate term. I would appreciate a response on this.

Deputy Seán Haughey: It is the responsibility of the Garda Commissioner to allocate personnel throughout the force, taking everything into account, and the situation in the Donegal division will be kept under review. I will bring the Senator's remarks to the attention of the Minister.

The Seanad adjourned at 6.30 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 25 February 2009.