



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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SEANAD ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 08 Bealtaine 2013

Wednesday, 08 May 2013

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach i gceannas ar 12.30 p.m.

*Machnamh agus Paidir.
Reflection and Prayer.*

Address to Seanad Éireann by Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn

An Cathaoirleach: On my behalf and that of my fellow Senators I welcome EU Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn. Our distinguished guest today is no stranger to Leinster House, having served as a Deputy for Galway West from 1975 until 1997. She was the first woman Cabinet Minister since the foundation of the State and served in a number of ministries during her Dáil career, including as Minister for Justice when she introduced substantial law reform and legislation. She was also a member of the Irish Government team which negotiated the joint declaration of December 1993 by the British and Irish Governments on peace and reconciliation in Ireland.

On top of this impressive political career, at various times she has worked as a part-time business consultant, non-executive director of a number of companies, teacher, newspaper columnist and television presenter. She is also a former member of the governing authority of the National University of Ireland Galway and an author. In 1999, she was appointed to the European Court of Auditors and was retained for a second term in 2006. She is before us today as Ireland's EU Commissioner with responsibility for research, innovation and science, a position she has held since February 2010. If I am not mistaken this marked another first for Ms Geoghegan-Quinn as she was Ireland's first woman EU Commissioner. The Commissioner with responsibility for research, innovation and science is a key portfolio for the European Union. Apple founder Steve Jobs once said that innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower. If we in Ireland and in the EU want to be leaders in the world of business, enterprise, science, education, communications, agrifood or health, we must innovate as well as follow. If we want the EU and Ireland to emerge from our current economic difficulties and address the challenges facing us, we will have to innovate, invest in research and development and promote high-tech enterprise across a wide variety of areas - from ICT to energy to food – to create sustainable jobs. As EU Commissioner, Ms Geoghegan-Quinn plays an important role in helping to stimulate economic growth across Europe in the drive to create jobs and stimulate research, development and innovation.

This newly elected Seanad is determined to modernise its procedures and actively engage with the civic society. To begin this process we have amended Standing Orders to allow persons and representatives of public and civic life to address Seanad Éireann. I thank Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn for agreeing to appear and I welcome her to the House. I look forward to her presentation and a positive and enlightening discussion.

Ms Máire Geoghegan-Quinn: A Chathaoirligh agus a Sheanadóirí, chaith mise dhá bhliain agus fiche ag teacht isteach agus amach as an Teach seo agus ag plé le díospóireachtaí ar go leor gnéithe éagsúla do pholasaithe Rialtas. Bhain mé an-taitneamh agus an-sult as sin agus d'fhoghlaim mé go leor. Tá mé fíor bhródúil a bheith ar ais anseo inniu le díospóireacht a bheith againn, díospóireacht a bhfuil súil agam a bheidh breá agus bríomhar, faoi chúrsaí Eorpacha.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to be present today. Tomorrow will be two years to the day since I had the great privilege of addressing the Oireachtas during a special Europe Day sitting. On that occasion I talked about where Europe might be in 2020 and I focused on Ireland's role in Europe, the many benefits of Ireland's membership of the European Union and the opportunities for Ireland in my own portfolio of research, innovation and science.

Two years later, the calendar has conspired to offer us two clear milestones on the journey that Ireland and the European Union are taking together. Ireland currently holds the Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers for the seventh time. This has been a successful Presidency, as has been the case on previous occasions. This year also marks the 40th anniversary of the country's accession to the European Economic Community. I can think of no better circumstances for our discussion.

The European Commission attaches huge importance to maintaining strong and close relations with national parliaments in Europe. I regularly meet committee delegations from different national parliaments, including the Oireachtas, to discuss political issues of mutual importance. Today presents another opportunity to have an open and frank exchange of views on European matters of importance to Ireland. I want to talk about the role that European research, innovation and science policies play in helping to support the development of the Irish economy. They are the best tools and resources at our disposal to create the growth and jobs that are the priority of the Irish Presidency and of all the European Union's decision makers.

Forty years of EU membership have transformed Ireland's economy. In 1973, we exported mainly agricultural products; now we export electronics, pharmaceuticals and services. When Ireland joined, its *per capita* GDP was two thirds of the EU average; it is now one quarter above the average. European programmes have played their part in that transformation. Ireland is a net beneficiary from structural, regional, cohesion and CAP funding. Since 1993, the European Social Fund has invested almost €4 billion in training and employment but that is only part of the story.

Since 2007 alone, Irish universities, research organisations, companies and SMEs have received €484 million from the Seventh Framework Programme for Research, FP7, and they are on course to draw down a total of more than €600 million by the time the programme finishes at the end of this year. I have no doubt that the Seanadóirí representing the National University of Ireland and Trinity College Dublin, TCD, can testify to the benefits of participating in the research framework programmes but I would like to outline a number of specific examples. Vornia Limited is a start-up medical device company, which was spun out from a NUI Galway laboratory that conducted research on biomaterials. The company is participating in a €1.2 mil-

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lion project to develop novel cardiovascular stents for people living with heart conditions. With the support of EU funding, UCD is examining how new robotic techniques can solve problems in our daily lives. Researchers at TCD are working to revolutionise high speed internet access while DCU is a leader in the field of diabetes research.

A grant from FP7's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions is helping fund research at CRANN, the Centre for Research on Adaptive Nanostructures and Nano-devices, in TCD into the creation of atom-thin nano sheets. These have many potential applications, including energy storage for electric cars or generating electricity from waste heat in power plants. TCD is also one of the biggest partners in the N4C project funded by FP7. It has been established to deploy and test new and alternative networking technologies for areas of Europe that have poor ICT connections. Ireland is at the heart of Europe's digital and information and communication technology industries. According to the industry association, ICT Ireland, nine of the top ten global companies maintain a presence in Ireland. This is testimony to how well Ireland has captured foreign direct investment in the ICT and other sectors, but there is also a robust and successful home grown ICT sector, built on the research base of Irish universities, companies and research institutes.

Research and development and innovation are essential to maintain this strength in ICT and grow even further but for this small country, it is not easy to achieve the necessary critical mass in research. Collaborating in EU funded research and innovation can help plug gaps in knowledge, resources or infrastructure. The inflow of European investment has helped Ireland. The country has shown a remarkable capacity to take full advantage of these investments and of European level co-operation. According to the European Commission's annual Innovation Scoreboard, Ireland leads the 27 member states in profiting from the economic effects of innovation, thanks to its performance in employment in knowledge intensive activities, the contribution of medium and high-tech product exports to the trade balance, knowledge intensive services exports and licence and patent revenues from abroad.

Ireland demonstrates a remarkable talent for innovation but there is still much more that we can do at European level to remove barriers to boost innovation. That is the goal of the Innovation Union flagship initiative, which I launched at the end of 2010. Innovation Union aims to improve the basic conditions that will let companies grow and entrepreneurs flourish. An environment in which business, large and small, can prosper is essential to achieving the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth that Europe desperately needs. We are concentrating on establishing the conditions that will smooth the path from the laboratory to the market and lead to new products and services that people around the world want to buy. We are making excellent progress on the 34 different commitments contained in Innovation Union. Our innovators and businesses needed a more affordable and less unwieldy, less costly patent system and, therefore, we established the unitary patent. SMEs and start-ups needed better access to finance, so we have created the European passport venture capital fund to ease the availability of funding opportunities across Europe. To give innovative companies a chance and get better value from public budgets, we have modernised public procurement rules to encourage the take-up of innovative products and services.

One of Innovation Union's biggest commitments is to achieve the European Research Area, ERA. Members should think of the ERA as a European single market for research, knowledge and ideas. It aims to spread excellence by encouraging cross-border collaboration and open innovation. The ERA initiative sets out a series of measures to enable researchers, research institutions and businesses to better move, compete and co-operate across borders.

In practice this means removing career and practical barriers to the free movement of researchers across national borders. It means reducing fragmentation and duplication in our national research systems. It also means a number of reforms in third level education. The European Commission has called on academia and business to improve linkages and develop more strategic partnerships, to define collaborative research agendas and optimise the use of research results. All this will lead to better science and the better valorisation of knowledge.

We have supported the policy goals of Innovation Union and the European research area through the 7th Research Framework Programme, but next year FP7 and all the other European level measures in research and innovation will be replaced by a single new programme, Horizon 2020. I was determined from the outset that Horizon 2020 should fundamentally reform how we finance research and innovation at the European level, and I was determined that it should support growth and jobs. While Horizon 2020 increases support for excellent research in Europe, including through the very successful European Research Council, there is a greater focus on innovation and economic impact. In line with the goals of Innovation Union, Horizon 2020 will provide a coherent set of funding instruments and practical support along the entire innovation chain, from basic research to close-to-market actions. The programme has also been designed to make our support for research and innovation simpler, more efficient and more effective at delivering the major impacts we need to boost growth and jobs and to tackle societal challenges such as climate change, health or energy security. Compared with previous programmes, Horizon 2020 will slash red tape to free up researchers and innovators to do their jobs. To make life simpler for SMEs there will be a single, comprehensive instrument adapted to their needs.

The negotiations between the European institutions on the EU budget for the period 2014 to 2020, including Horizon 2020, are going well, and during the last trilogue discussions, concrete progress was made on a number of provisions. There are issues that require further discussion, but I am confident of the outcome, and I remain fully committed to continuing our work, together with the European Parliament and member states, to obtain a timely adoption of the Horizon 2020 package.

We need Horizon 2020 as a declaration of Europe's intention to keep investing in the knowledge economy. While 5 million jobs were lost in the EU between 2008 and 2010, the number of jobs in the knowledge economy increased by 800,000. The member states with a high research and innovation capacity and intensity, the ones that spent more than 2.5% of their GDP on research and innovation in 2011, had an average unemployment rate of 6.6% in October 2012. For the countries at the other end of the scale, which invested less than 1.5% of GDP in research and innovation in 2011, their unemployment rate was more than double that of the innovation-intense countries, at 13.8%.

Up to 2011, a majority of the 27 member states managed to maintain or increase their public research and development investment, despite huge pressure on budgets. Worryingly, however, in 2011, fewer countries managed to do so, and overall public spending on research and development decreased for the first time since the crisis. We need to maintain research and development investment in Europe, but we also need to get better value for money. We know that the research sector is underperforming in some member states and that some produce more science and technology excellence and innovation than others with the same investment. The reform of the European research area is one of the critical structural reforms for growth. As Ireland demonstrates, a top class research base is one of the biggest draws for foreign investment. In fact, foreign direct investment in research and development is holding up.

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The United States, which accounts for two thirds of internationally mobile research and development investment, is holding firm. American companies invest ten times as much in research and development in Europe per year as they do in China and India combined. Therefore, there are convincing reasons to continue investing in the drivers of growth and jobs – education, research and innovation – and Horizon 2020 will be an important factor in the equation.

Tomorrow, 9 May, is Europe Day. Perhaps if we look back and see how far Ireland has come in 40 years, it will give us reason to celebrate and it will give us confidence that we will make as much progress again in the coming decades. EU membership has transformed the way we live and work. It has nurtured new industries and renewed old ones. It has spurred infra-structural development in our cities and our countryside. It has secured fundamental rights and freedoms and helped protect our environment. It has made life a little fairer for women. As a member of the EU, Ireland is part of the Single Market which comprises 500 million people and where there is free movement of goods, persons, services and capital across 27 member states. That provides an enormous market for the export of Irish goods and services that are key to economic recovery.

We are going through difficult and challenging times, but Europe and Ireland can and will come through stronger. The European Union has to deliver economic recovery if it is to prove its continued relevance to everyone in Europe. This is both a political and a communications challenge. As I said in my recent speech in Dublin on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of EU membership, we cannot have a Europe of the haves and the have-nots. We know what our challenges are at a national and at a European level, and we have to address the pressing political problems we face in a spirit of determination, co-operation and solidarity.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank the Commissioner.

Senator Maurice Cummins: I welcome most sincerely the Commissioner, Ms Máire Geoghegan-Quinn. It is fitting during Europe week that we would have our own Commissioner address the House. Since the 24th Seanad commenced in 2011, I have endeavoured to fulfil the wish of the House for a more formal engagement with European institutions which have such an influence on our politics and the daily lives of all of us. We have had a number of engaging debates in recent months with our European parliamentary colleagues. The list of distinguished people is being added to today by the Commissioner's presence and I am grateful for her attendance.

I am encouraged to learn about the nature and extent of the work being done in the area of research and innovation in the European Union. I say that because the challenges facing industry, governments and policymakers are very significant. Despite signs of some green shoots, our domestic economy and the European economy remain sluggish. Even though four years have passed since the start of the financial crisis, people are suffering. When we talk about challenges, there are no greater societal challenges than ensuring innovation and technology are used to create jobs. Unemployment remains stubbornly high. This is not just an economic problem, it is also a societal challenge. We know that those who are without jobs are more at risk of poverty. Life chances diminish considerably for those who enter the poverty traps and long-term structural unemployment. Cyclical generational unemployment affects families and whole communities. I know this only too well coming from the city of Waterford which has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. This influences people's health, their education, their ability to participate in the labour market, their purchasing power, their technical know-how and their contribution to society generally.

1 o'clock

By using technology, research and innovation to drive product, service and market improvements to create sustainable employment, we can create quality jobs that will help us to address not only the economic deficits, but also the grand societal challenges which exist, not only in Ireland but right across the European Union. In turn, this will help to address the inequalities and imbalances in health outcomes, educational opportunities and labour market participation. That is why achieving political agreement on the Horizon 2020 package, the key research and innovation priority of the Irish Presidency, is so important, as Ms Geoghegan-Quinn mentioned.

I appreciate that it is a challenging process to reconcile the interests and perspectives of all the parties involved, but no doubt the sheer commitment of the Government, the Commission and all the stakeholders will be key to advancing these negotiations and making the necessary progress quickly to ensure there will be sufficient time to give effect to the necessary legislative procedures to implement Horizon 2020 from the start of 2014. For my part, any legislation that comes before this House will be given early consideration and enacted, and not delayed unnecessarily.

I thank the Commissioner most sincerely for coming to the House today in Europe Week. I look forward to a robust exchange of views with Members of the House, who rightly and continually seek debates on research and innovation and job creation.

Senator Terry Leyden: Cuirim fáilte roimh Ms Máire Geoghegan-Quinn. I welcome her team as well. She has an effective team Europe, so to speak.

We in Ireland are proud of the work Ms Geoghegan-Quinn is doing as Commissioner. She is extraordinarily well-equipped. In being appointed Commissioner from Ireland, she was the right person at the right time in the right era. Of course, she has a role for all 500 million citizens and she ably represents those as well, but she is home now and I welcome her home.

It is lovely to hear Ms Geoghegan-Quinn's beautiful blas. Irish has been so well spoken by her throughout her career and we are always proud to hear that beautiful Galway Irish. It is just lovely to hear it again today in this House.

As Minister of State, I worked with Ms Geoghegan-Quinn in the Dáil. One aspect of her Ministries was that she took complete control of them in the sense that she was innovative and decisive. I recall many instances when she, as a Minister, took decisions and could see exactly what was right to do in her portfolio. One could write extensively about her career.

For me, among the highlights was her period as Minister for Justice. It was most innovative, progressive and liberal and the courageous decisions she took at that time have had a major impact on this country. She did not delay or defer them. She stood up and took them. People realise the importance and significance of those decisions.

Ms Geoghegan-Quinn also was progressive when it came to the development of an institution in Castlerea in County Roscommon. While it may not always be appreciated, at that time, it was a major issue. It has a major effect on the economy of County Roscommon and surrounding areas and I am sure she does not mind me mentioning those events which had a relevance to myself and the late former Minister, Sean Doherty, in the constituency of Roscommon-East Galway.

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Senator Ned O’Sullivan: All politics is local.

Senator Terry Leyden: Exactly. Well put by Senator O’Sullivan.

The Leader of the House has been innovative in bringing distinguished visitors here, and none more distinguished than Ms Geoghegan-Quinn. She was the first woman Cabinet Minister in the history of the State. It is difficult to believe that a woman as young as herself was the first. In that sense, it was a new mould. We have come from Arbour Hill today where we recognised what this country has achieved by the sacrifices of the men and women of 1916. It took so long for a woman to be appointed to Cabinet, and Ms Geoghegan-Quinn was the first. It was a matter the Cathaoirleach mentioned.

Ms Geoghegan-Quinn’s work is vital. As a former trade Minister, I realise that research and development is vital. Her speech was progressive. I heard her on “Morning Ireland” this morning as well, where she outlined her work in Brussels. She brought to that her knowledge of industry in the then Department of Industry and Commerce and all the Ministries in which she served. She had a good grounding for her job as Commissioner because she realises what is vital - research and development and the development of small industries. Her work in research with the universities here is vital.

Tomorrow, as Ms Geoghegan-Quinn stated, is Europe Day. Since we joined the European Union, we have had 40 years of development and progress. The European Union has been good to Ireland and Ireland has been good to Europe. As such, it is a two-way message.

Ms Geoghegan-Quinn’s work is vital. The area of research on alternative energy - wave, wind and solar - is one field that she has been discussing. These are areas where we can eliminate or certainly reduce our input into energy. There are controversies relating to wind power, and those can be resolved. There are areas of this country where residencies would not be affected. People are affected by turbines. That is a fact and it causes distress, but there are numerous locations in which they can be erected without causing distress. They are essential. We are blessed with the best wind power in Europe. It is an area that is being developed.

The technology for wave energy has not yet been fully developed. Ms Geoghegan-Quinn could see the Atlantic Ocean at home and will be aware of the power there. That is an area in which more research needs to be done.

When all this research and development is done, let us build these in Ireland. With respect to our friends in China, the turbines, wave energy and all of that innovation can be manufactured in this country. Ireland has a good manufacturing base and it can continue in that regard.

I thank Ms Geoghegan-Quinn for coming to the House. We are delighted to have her here. We wish her continued success as Commissioner in the role she plays. I believe she is making an enormous contribution to Europe and to the development of this country.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I, too, welcome the Commissioner, Ms Geoghegan-Quinn, to the House. I thank her for coming to speak to us. As the Leader, Senator Cummins, stated, her visit here is part of a formal engagement process we are undertaking with the European Union, with our representatives in the European Union and with others in the European Union, such as Commissioners. We invited a number of Ireland’s MEPs and we have had constructive engagements with them, but it is particularly good to welcome Ms Geoghegan-Quinn here.

The Cathaoirleach mentioned Ms Geoghegan-Quinn's illustrious political career, and I thought I might add a few more reflections on how her career has paved the way for some positive developments that are still ongoing. As the Cathaoirleach stated, she was made a Minister in 1979 and, of course, the first woman Cabinet Minister since Constance Markievicz or since the foundation of the State. She was then Chair of the first parliamentary committee on women's rights in the 1980s. Following other Ministries, as Minister for Justice in 1993, in a particularly noteworthy Ministry, she introduced some important reforms. Of course, the 1993 Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act was of special importance in decriminalising homosexuality. It is perhaps a reflection on how far we have come since then that we are now contemplating a referendum next year on gay marriage or marriage equality following the Constitutional Convention's strong vote in favour of such a referendum.

Of course, the other aspect of the 1993 Act often overlooked were the provisions reforming the law on prostitution. I thought the Commissioner might be interested to hear that today the Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality will review a report it is compiling on prostitution to look at further potential reform in the law. There are a number of ways in which Ms Geoghegan-Quinn's Ministry and career has paved the way for further change.

I offer my personal thanks again to Ms Geoghegan-Quinn for participating in the December 2008 event held in the Dáil Chamber to celebrate women's participation in politics with the Oireachtas women's day. As she will be aware, since then we passed the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012, which will see quite a transformation in the gender breakdown in politics as it will require political parties to select at least 30% of their candidates of each gender in the next general election. Hopefully, there will be a big increase in the numbers of women ultimately elected. These all are positive developments and I pay tribute to Ms Geoghegan-Quinn's work in paving the way for some of these.

Turning to the topic of Ms Geoghegan-Quinn's speech and her work as Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, I am delighted to see in her article in *The Irish Times* today that she spoke of the need to ensure a focus on humanities and social sciences and that these are not neglected. Often these areas can be overlooked when we speak about leading innovation in the ICT and high-tech sectors. To declare an interest, in my capacity as an academic I received EU funding in the 1990s for research on rape law which informed changes in how we prosecute and try rape cases in Ireland. It was very helpful to us to receive EU funding which enabled us to examine comparative laws in other jurisdictions and see best practice elsewhere. There are many examples of how in many different areas we can see EU funding assisting innovation and progress in different ways.

The Commissioner's work more generally in devising Horizon 2020 is hugely important. The Minister of State, Deputy Seán Sherlock, is chairing negotiations on Horizon 2020 and there is a clear imperative to ensure the transition between FP7 and Horizon 2020 is smooth with no hiatus or gap in which cracks could appear. Agreement is required on the €70 billion to €80 billion package because it is also an important stimulus for the European economy, as the Commissioner outlined clearly in her speech, with a potential €1 billion drawdown for Ireland. It is important that we simplify the funding cost model, move to a unified model and see a drawdown for Ireland.

It is also timely to note that today is the day the QS university rankings have been published. As a Senator for Dublin University I am particularly proud and glad to see Trinity College Dublin doing particularly well, with a top 50 ranking in four subjects and a top 100 in 14 more,

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including my subject of law. It is very good to see other Irish universities also doing well in the rankings. It is good to see we are clearly punching above our weight at a time of cutbacks throughout the third level sector.

The Commissioner referred to many of the innovative projects in various Irish academic institutions, such as CRANN in Trinity where research is leading the field. The key imperative with regard to Horizon 2020 is the need to bridge the gap between research and the market, about which the Commissioner has spoken previously. She stated Ireland leads in profiting from the economic effects of innovation and she outlined some of the challenges. The EU overall faces challenges, as it still lags behind the innovation leaders of the US, Japan and South Korea. Although we are closing the gap, and the Commissioner is very conscious of the need to close this gap, we must be aware that while we have had progress at EU level there is no room for complacency in how we fund and generate research. The European research area initiative is exciting because it offers greater potential for a joined up approach to leading in innovation. How can we ensure the three imperatives of invest, reform and transform, which the Commissioner mentioned in previous speeches, are met through Horizon 2020? How can we ensure Horizon 2020 will cut red tape, which is one of the great promises it makes? I know from personal experience the large amount of red tape which comes with any granting of EU funding for research. It is important to ensure transparency and accountability and that research funding is made on a merit basis only, but at the same time it can be very off-putting for people seeking the funding.

How do we ensure Horizon 2020 is the benchmark for funding the entire chain and the benchmark for linking academic work to the market value we all hope we will achieve? I thank the Commissioner for her very thought-provoking words and for coming to speak to us today.

Senator Katherine Zappone: I join everyone in welcoming the Commissioner for this robust exchange of views on the subject of how her portfolio can contribute to the Irish economic recovery. I echo all of the affirmations everyone else has given in terms of her previous roles and contribution to the State. It is a great privilege and pleasure as an Irish lesbian to thank her in the Seanad Chamber for her vision in decriminalising homosexuality. It helped to pave the way to where we are today, as Senator Bacik stated. It is wonderful to be able to thank her.

In light of some of the prime issues with which we are grappling in Ireland today, the Commissioner has spoken extensively about Horizon 2020. She mentioned it in her speech and it was great to hear it is a key cornerstone of EU economic policy and rightly so. The year 2020 is only seven years away and we need the policy, as the Commissioner stated emphatically. It is important, particularly if we are to secure higher levels of foreign direct investment into Ireland and back indigenous industries to a greater extent. In her speech the Commissioner mentioned small and medium enterprises, which are the backbone of any economy. What level of support will be given to small and medium-sized companies under Horizon 2020? Does the Commissioner feel enough companies are aware of the proper funding opportunities under Horizon 2020? She spoke about modernising procurement rules, but perhaps other measures could support awareness in terms of access. It is very important to back these policy sectors if the Irish economy is to become more competitive and sustainable.

Social innovation has had many positive impacts and advantages in Europe. Significant high-level initiatives aim to offer more support to social innovation and social innovators. We have had much debate and discussion in the Seanad on these issues. As the Commissioner knows well, they are emerging at European level as well as at national level in Ireland and

many other countries throughout Europe. As a long-time advocate of social innovation, and as a social entrepreneur myself, I welcome and support this development enthusiastically because social innovation brings forward new strategies and concepts to improve lives and solve social problems to the benefit of greater society. The Leader referred to some of these social difficulties. Social entrepreneurs are not driven by profit but by public good but they can create economic growth, jobs and wealth in society. Social innovators, due to their philanthropic approach to their commercial activities more often than not, as the Commissioner knows, employ people from disadvantaged backgrounds in their organisations, so in addition to the main social objective they make a contribution to social cohesion, reducing inequality and moving beyond the haves and have-nots in other ways.

The Commissioner spoke about the Union innovation initiative which recognises the value of social innovation. It states social innovation should become a mainstream focus in the next generation of European social fund programmes. Member states are encouraged to step up efforts to promote social innovation. Research initiatives which would create models for acquiring growth capital from State, interstate and philanthropic sources would be of great assistance. How would the Commissioner rate the impact of social innovation on economic growth in general? How does she see social innovation being put to best use for the development of our economy using public and private funding, but also with the support of European social and innovation funding?

The engagement today highlights the importance of political interaction between the European Commission and national parliaments in Europe. Taking this into account, it would be a little remiss of me in light of where I stand on some of these issues not to take this opportunity to ask the Commissioner her views, if she might share them with us, on the future of the Seanad. Noting that she served in the Oireachtas for 22 years, does she believe the Seanad should be abolished?

Senator Terry Leyden: No.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: Cuirim fáilte roimh an Coimisinéir. I thank her for her words of wisdom and for drawing attention to the fact the University Senators should be especially interested and grateful for the work she has done under the seventh framework. Some are in the Gallery, including Professor Cliona O'Farrelly from the Trinity College biochemistry department. She is interested in immunology also.

We must innovate. A cartoon shows two dinosaurs saying they are too big to fail, and we have heard this phrase far too frequently with regard to banking. The Leader drew attention to the problems he sees in his city of Waterford. One will find them in traditional industrial centres such as Belfast, Derry, Waterford, as the Leader said, and Limerick. People must innovate. It is most important that the Commissioner keeps the momentum going. As she said, Ireland's success is linked to the nine out of ten top global companies coming here. They like an environment of innovation. They like meeting scientists, innovators and engineers. I am sure that innovation has influenced our new economy here much more than tax breaks or grants.

Science has been neglected and overlooked in Irish schools and teacher training colleges. I wonder if the Commissioner can do something to spur an improvement. Rural science and nature studies was a subject in primary schools in the 1920s and we need to return to that state. Not all academic work is based at a desk or in libraries. Imagine the release that many students could enjoy if they were released into the countryside as witnessed in the recent RTE

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programme “Secrets of the Irish Landscape” which was based on the work of people like Professor Frank Mitchell, Dr. Matthew Jebb and of course Robert Lloyd Praeger. That would be of interest to people in education who find the desk-based system unattractive.

I wish to discuss the neglect of sciences in teacher training. Is the H.Dip programme the correct way to train teachers if we want to develop a new interest in sciences? The neglect manifests itself somewhat in the problem of red tape discussed by the Commissioner that she is trying to abolish. When attempting to get through all of the red tap some scientists are tempted to downgrade their teaching work. That would be a serious mistake if people could “buy-out” their teaching using the Commission’s research grants because we must produce the next generation of scientists.

I spoke to some Irish graduates in Cambridge. Of course, Ernest Walton, the only Irish Nobel Prize winner for science, came from there. Graduates, particularly the female ones, from Trinity College Dublin who studied at Cambridge remembered his lectures because he knew that physics was not a school subject up to 50 or 60 years ago. He took a special interest in how girls who had never studied physics adapted to their studies. They remembered him as their best lecturer and that he won a Nobel Prize. We are inclined to neglect lecturing and teaching. If we continue to do so then the next generation of scientists and innovators will be overlooked. Therefore, it is important that we reform aspects of the education system to reflect those dimensions.

As Senator Bacik said, recently we had a good discussion with the Minister of State, Deputy Sherlock, on the development of science and technology. He has the youth and enthusiasm for its development. The subject comes within the Commissioner’s remit. We are concerned that picking winners sometimes can mean going to next year’s race meeting with a two-year old race card. We need flexibility in the sector. It would enable us to drop programmes that do not work and introduce new ones. I appreciate that she has said that there is a need for returns and income from patents and royalties but provision should be made for some necessary blue skies research.

The Commissioner is most welcome. She is from the west of Ireland and so is an tUachtarán, the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and the Cathaoirleach of the Seanad. The Offaly people barely got Barack Obama into office in time before his post went to the west of Ireland. I hope that her work precedes us and there is great interest in it now. As she will know, Mr. James D. Watson was in the National Botanic Gardens last Sunday week to unveil a memorial dedicated to the discovery of DNA and he has Tipperary links. There is a huge interest in science now but I would like to see it reach schools and teacher training. The Commissioner has undertaken a most important task and the track on which she has embarked upon is the correct one. I wish her well in her endeavours.

An Cathaoirleach: I remind the Senator that Mr. Joe Biden, Vice President of the United States, hails from Ballina, County Mayo.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Bhí sé ráite i riamh i gConamara gur fánach an áit a gheofaí gliomach ach tá triúr sa Seanad inniu agus b’fhéidir gur seo an chéad uair i riamh gur triúr de bhunadh Charna atá istigh anseo, an Coimisinéir, an Seanadóir Keane agus mé féin. Bhí sé ráite i riamh go raibh an-teacht aniar i muintir an iarthair agus táimid á chruthú sin inniu. Cuirim fáilte roimh an Choimisinéir agus gabhaim comhghairdeas di as ucht a ceapacháin. Tá sí ag déanamh sár-obair sa ról atá aici.

San am gairid atá agam, ba mhaith liom tagairt a dhéanamh do roinnt ceisteanna atá tagtha chun cinn. Luaigh an Coimisinéir féin an cheist a bhaineann le hinfheistíocht indíreach ó na hollchomhlachtaí, go bhfuil siad ag coinneáil suas le cúrsaí ach tá na SMEs ag titim siar go mór ó thaobh infheistíochta de. Luaigh sé an rómhaorlathas nó red tape. Cén chaoi a bhfeicimid laghdú an rómhaorlathais sin ag tarlú ar an talamh? Cén chaoi a mbeidh na comhlachtaí beaga sa tír seo, atá mar bhunchloch na heacnamaíochta, in ann tarraingt as na cistí seo leis an eacnamaíocht a chur chun cinn?

Luadh soláthar poiblí. Táimid i nGaillimh ag déanamh roinnt obair air sin faoi láthair. Ceann de na lochtanna a chuirtear i leith an Aontais Eorpaigh go minic ná go bhfuilimid ag cailleadh go leor gnó sa tír seo mar gheall ar an phróiseas soláthair phoiblí mar go dtéann sé chuig ollchomhlachtaí móra ar fud na hEorpa. Tuigtear dom go n-úsáidtear na clásail shóisialta seo mar chuid den phróiseas i dtíortha eile. Cén chaoi is féidir linne in Éirinn ar sciar féin de na conarthaí móra seo a choinneáil chun úsáid níos fearr a bhaint as na clásail shóisialta ach fós fanacht taobh istigh de na rialacha Eorpacha?

Tá sprioc atá leagtha síos ó thaobh taighde agus forbartha de 3%, ach de réir na meastachán atá againn sa tír seo, táimid ag leagan síos sprice dúinn féin de 1.7% de réir na Roinne Post, Fiontar agus Nuálaíochta. An bhfuil contúirt ann dá bhrí sin go bhfuil sprioc ró-íseal leagtha síos againn sa tír go gcoinneoidimid suas lenár gcomhghleacaithe san Eoraip agus go dtarraingeoidimid anuas a bhfuil de thacaíocht le fáil ón Aontas Eorpach mar nach bhfuilimid ach ag leagan síos sprice de 1.7% anseo agus gurb í 3% an sprioc Eorpach?

Ach oiread leis an Seanadóir Zappone, tá eilifint eile sa seomra faoi láthair, eilifint an déine. Bheadh sé an-deacair gan sin a lua leis an Choimisinéir. Tá na beartais déine atá á gcur i bhfeidhm ag an Aontas Eorpach ag déanamh scriosta ar an tír seo, tá siad ag déanamh andeacrachta ó thaobh na heacnamaíochta de, le gearradh siar agus easpa fáis. Ní hé réimse an Choimisinéara faoi leith é ach bíonn sí ag caint leis na Coimisinéirí eile, Manuel Barroso ach oiread. Tá sé an-tábhachtach cur in iúl don Choimisiún nach bhfuil na beartais déine ag obair. Níl siad ag cur fáis chun cinn agus dá bhrí sin ní féidir linn gnólachtaí a choinneáil ag feidhmiú agus ní féidir infheistíocht chuí a dhéanamh. Ba bhreá linn dá dtabharfadh an Coimisinéir an teachtaireacht sin ar ais chun na hEorpa.

An Cathaoirleach: I ask the Commissioner to respond to the lead questioners first because quite a number of Senators have indicated that they would like to ask questions afterwards.

Ms Máire Geoghegan-Quinn: Certainly. I express my thanks for the robust debate that was promised. It is interesting that all of the Senators are so engaged in this policy area. That is something that has happened over the years with people realising that is a policy for growth in Europe. The European Commission has been to the fore from day 1 saying that we need to continue the stability measures that Senator Ó Clochartaigh spoke of.

At the same time the Commission said that the flip side of the coin is growth. If we want to create jobs then we must make the economy much more competitive. The package for growth must be Horizon 2020. I am very pleased that in the middle of the very difficult discussions that took place at the Heads of Government and State levels, despite all of the other areas of policy being cut back, we managed in my area to get a 30% increase, or thereabouts, in our budget. That was very important, even though we did not get as much as we would have liked.

From an Irish point of view it is extraordinary that a country this small, and on the very

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edge of the European Union, can punch way above its weight and has already drawn down €484 million from Framework Programme 7. I believe that it will achieve its target of €600 million by the end of the year. There is an enormous debt of gratitude due to all of the stakeholders involved, particularly Enterprise Ireland. It organised, in a key way, for its individual staff members to deal with different areas of policy that European research funding can reach in areas such as health, energy, food and so on. This has been a tremendous success and is viewed as a template by other countries which would like to secure the same level of support.

It is good to discuss European affairs and I have engaged in a number of discussions with the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs. It is also good to have an open debate in the Seanad and I compliment Senators on arranging this discussion.

The area of research and science presents great challenges for governments and policymakers. Governments that must make extremely challenging budgetary decisions find it difficult to protect this element of the budget. The best example of a member state taking such a tough decision was Finland in the early 1990s. Despite the country being on the floor economically, the Finnish Government made a conscious decision to protect funding for research and innovation. The European Innovation Union Scoreboard consistently shows Finland at the top of the innovation tree.

I remember from my time in government the pressure to pursue policies and make decisions that deliver an instant result, one which allows the population to see that their taxes are delivering immediate results, for example, in new jobs. Research and innovation, as a long-term investment, does not work in this way. It has, however, paid off for this country. As Senator Barrett pointed out, the large number of global companies located in Ireland prove we have the skill sets that are necessary. All countries face the challenges to which the Senator alluded, including what children are learning in schools. President Obama regularly refers to STEM education, in other words, science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Young people have moved away from these subjects because they believe it is more difficult to obtain the marks they need to go to college in these subjects. Moreover, children's love of science frequently depends on their teacher.

Last year, at the Euroscience Open Forum in Dublin, we honoured Mr. Jim Cooke who taught in Synge Street. The school would not be widely regarded as being endowed with all the equipment and support services needed to provide a Rolls Royce system of science teaching. By sheer dint of hard work and enthusiasm, however, Mr. Cooke has managed to achieve the best record in the country for numbers of science laureates not only in the Young Scientist competition, but on the European stage. His achievement shows that teachers can instil in pupils a great grá for a subject.

While the European Union does not have any competence in education, Commissioner Vassiliou and I have consistently encouraged teacher training colleges to examine the way in which they teach subjects and the concentration that is required. If we are to retain companies and encourage others to locate here, we need to be able to provide the skill sets they need.

Senator Cummins referred to the high level of unemployment in Waterford. As I regularly point out around Europe, Waterford has one of the smallest third level institutes in Ireland. People often say their third level body will never reach the level of excellence required to secure a grant from the European Research Council, ERC, which awards grants to individual researchers and scientists to do the blue sky research we need and without which we would not have

innovation. Professor Nolan from the Waterford Institute of Technology is one of only a small number of Irish recipients of ERC grants. He and his team are doing amazing work. Their success proves that those who are talented and focus on what they need can achieve their goal.

Every speaker referred to small and medium-sized enterprises, of which there are approximately 26 million in Europe. These companies, the backbone of the economy, experience the greatest difficulty in accessing funding. This was one of the major issues my team and I addressed when we were devising a successor to the seventh framework programme, FP7. Everybody said there was too much red tape, the administrative burden was too great and applying for funding cost too much. While the large companies have substantial departments dealing with administration, small companies cannot afford a large administrative burden. We asked how we could make it easier for smaller companies to access funding. We looked at the companies experiencing the greatest difficulty and decided to remove red tape by providing a single instrument for small and medium enterprises, creating a single postbox for applying for the funding and eliminating all other barriers to SMEs accessing the programme. While many companies and high level research institutes and universities are involved in the programme, I want many more to become involved. Universities no longer view themselves as ivory towers which should not get involved with industry and now want to be involved and work with industry, particularly in the area of research and innovation.

We worked with the European Parliament and included in FP7 a 15% target for small and medium-sized companies. We have surpassed the target in many areas and we are still in discussion with the European Parliament on Horizon 2020. This issue has been raised repeatedly because people want to ensure small and medium enterprise is encouraged to access the programme. My focus is on having a simpler programme with one set of rules that are interpreted in the same way regardless of which area of the European Commission one deals with and where everyone understands and has access to the programme.

Senator Bacik referred to the transition between FP7 and Horizon 2020. This is important because if we do not secure agreement on Horizon 2020 by the end of the Irish Presidency, we will have a gap in funding at the end of 2013 and start of 2014. Researchers and scientists do not want gaps because they need coherence and to be able to engage in long-term planning. They need to know from where funding will come from one year to the next. If we do not have the framework programme agreed by the end of June, it will be a matter of serious concern to everybody. The Senator referred to the Minister of State, Deputy Sean Sherlock. The Government has done a great job working with the European Parliament and Commission to try to find areas of agreement to enable the programme to be concluded. The budget is of major significance for all areas of policy, including my area.

Bridging the gap between research and the market is what the Innovation Union initiative is all about. Europe does wonderful, basic blue sky research and wants to continue to lead the world in this area. To take a simple example, MP3 technology was developed in Europe but commercialised in the United States. This is where the challenge lies. When we asked all the stakeholders how we could bring this research to the marketplace, they told us that standard setting is too slow in Europe and must be accelerated. Commission Vice President Tajani is actively engaged in doing this. We also heard about the lack of venture capital funding and in that context I referred to the passport. We heard about a lack of a unitary patent which makes patents much more expensive than in the United States and elsewhere.

China, Japan, Singapore and other countries that are very much engaged in research and

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innovation are no longer distant from Europe but next door. They are investing enormous amounts of money. While their investment levels are not close to those of Europe yet, they are creeping upwards. Europe has a duty to maintain funding in research and innovation on the basis that it delivers economic competitiveness, growth and, eventually, jobs. We are talking about jobs that are critical but also of top quality.

I am sorry for going on so long, a Chathaoirligh, but this matter was raised by a number of people. The European research area is all about building a Single Market for knowledge and ideas so that, regardless of which country one is in, one can move to another country to continue research. We all know that researchers sometimes have short contracts and are not always sure where they will be after three years. Therefore, we need to facilitate them to be able to move around. Commissioner Andor has been working on a system of supplementary pensions which would help in that regard.

A big challenge for us concerns women in science, including female students taking up science subjects. We now have a programme which we are rolling out across the 27 member states to encourage more girls to become involved in science. With apologies to all the gentlemen present, science will thus no longer be seen as something that is about old men in white coats. We need role models for all young people but especially to get more girls into science and keep them there.

Yesterday, I had the great honour of talking about social sciences and the humanities at the Royal Irish Academy. Last year, I attended a major transport conference in Greece. It was not an event where one would expect the social sciences to be discussed. After the conference speeches, however, there was a question and answer session. A social scientist at the back of the hall said: "You are talking about innovation but are forgetting about us. You are forgetting about what we do and how to support us." I said that was not the case. The first pillar of Horizon 2020 is all about excellence, blue skies research and doubling of funding for the European Research Council. An Austrian gentleman beside me, who has a company involved in developing motor accessories, said he could not develop anything for a car unless he had a social scientist telling him how his customers would react. Therefore, they need to interpret how customers will react. For me it is all about being interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary with everybody working together. In that way, social scientists can work with engineers and ICT experts to have an ecosystem in research and innovation that we really need.

An Cathaoirleach: Quite a lot of Senators have indicated so unless they are very brief, taking about 30 seconds each, the Commissioner will not get a chance to respond.

Senator Deirdre Clune: The Commissioner is welcome to the House. I agree with her that Horizon 2020 is very important, particularly if we are to encourage states to continue to invest in research and innovation. The Commissioner mentioned a third-level call to consolidate research. I am conscious that there is so much research going on, although it may not be enough, involving that which is publicly funded either by individual states or the EU. What plans does the Commissioner have to encourage such a call? A call is all well and good but we really need to ensure that if research is going on across the EU, it should be available for all. Certainly, if it is efficient and publicly funded, it makes sense to be consolidated and available for all.

Senator Jim Walsh: Maraon le Seanadóirí eile, cuirim fáilte Uí Cheallaigh roimh an Coimisinéir anseo inniu. Mar a dúirt sí féin, is minic a raibh sí sa Teach seo mar Aire Rialtas agus Aire Stát le haghaidh díospóireachtaí agus Billí éagsúla a phlé.

While this may deviate somewhat from the Commissioner's portfolio, I wish to ask about agriculture which is still an important area for this country, despite the fact that we have expanded our exports into many other areas. Our fishing industry is also very important. Given the current discussions on the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy, it is fundamental that the outcomes are positive for Europe, including Ireland. I invite the Commissioner to comment on that point.

I have been critical in the House and elsewhere of the failure of the European Commission and the European Council to deal with the current unprecedented economic crisis we are facing. It looks to me as if it is being dealt with almost on a crisis-management basis, rather than through any great masterplan to deal with the difficulties we have. To concentrate on unemployment, 25% of our young people aged 18 and 35 are unemployed. In parts of Europe, the unemployment rate is over 50% so there is a real need to get ahead of the curve. Would the Commissioner like to comment on that?

Senator Susan O'Keefe: I welcome the Commissioner to the House. She outlined the importance of Horizon 2020 but is there a chasm between those who are trying to make it work and the wider world? There is still a gap of knowledge and understanding which we can see for parents and young people who have not quite caught on to the STEM subjects mentioned earlier by the Commissioner. I recently ran an event for parents in the Sligo Institute of Technology to help them guide their children in that direction. Does the Commissioner have any particular thoughts on that point? For example, Sligo Institute of Technology has had a world Microsoft winner with the Imagine Cup. This year they won the Ireland section and will be going to St. Petersburg to compete, yet we are still struggling at school level to get young people involved in STEM subjects.

As the Commissioner knows, the Minister of State, Deputy Sherlock, is very keen to get an agreement in that regard. Can the Commissioner provide more details of the timeline involved and how it will pan out in the next month?

Senator Feargal Quinn: The Commissioner is very welcome and I was delighted to hear her speech. I have four points, one of which concerns red tape. There must be something we can do about red tape. In France, they do not have the same red tape for a company employing four people as for one employing 400. We do not seem to have done enough, but is the answer in our hands or in Europe's hands?

As regards energy supply, we have the answer in Europe and America with fracking for shale gas. It must be possible to examine this here. We have once again started an inquiry which will delay us two years, yet there is a huge opportunity involved.

It is so interesting to see what New Zealand has been able to do in research on food. We are doing a lot here but are we doing enough in Europe as a whole to research food, particularly dairy, and what has been done concerning exports for China?

As regards investing in research, does the Commissioner have a view on crowd funding - the ability to get many people to invest in companies with the objective not solely of making money but also of supporting that company at the same time?

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: Ó chailín amháin as Gaillimh go cailín eile as Gaillimh, cuirim fáilte roimh Máire Geoghegan-Quinn go dtí an Teach seo.

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I have always seen the Commissioner as a big-picture politician and it is lovely to hear that being recognised here today. I have two brief questions. I am a member of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs. One point that struck me was that if we implemented the EU services directive our growth would increase by 2% of GDP. The Commissioner's portfolio is about growth, innovation and our future, both here and in Europe. Looking across the different Commissioners that Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn works with, what is slowing down the implementation of that directive? If it can deliver us a 2% growth in GDP it would be very significant.

My second point is similar to what Senators Bacik and Zappone said. Social innovation is critical, as are our social entrepreneurs. That is greatly enhanced by funding from the Leader programme in Europe. As the Commissioner knows, we are now coming to the end of that funding cycle. Because of that hiatus or lapse, projects that are just about to be approved will not be picked up again for funding until 2015. Can the Commissioner influence that? Innovation at community level does influence local economies, communities and big-picture issues eventually.

Senator Marc MacSharry: I welcome the Commissioner to the House. Since the bank guarantee and the global recession, there is a sense in this country that very little has been done for the people in a European context. Ireland arguably saved the euro by its actions at the beginning of the crisis. Before Europe was up the curve on it, steps were taken here which nobody else was expected to take. Does Germany have an unhealthy influence on the overall fiscal direction that is being determined by Europe? I have noted the Commissioner's own comments that the need for growth policies in parallel to those of austerity must come into play, as President Higgins said this week. Clearly, people on the ground in Ireland, despite the best efforts of Government, are asking what is being done for them. What does Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn feel Europe can do? Should there be some level of sovereign write-down of debt to facilitate in equipping programme nations to do something on the ground for the people? What can be done tangibly instead of the fluffy talk we have heard about job creation from various countries?

Senator Colm Burke: I welcome the Commissioner. It was interesting that she referred to women in science. It is important we highlight the benefits of research and development. Today is ovarian cancer day, to raise awareness of that issue. In the last two months, research funding of €6 million was announced for investigation of pre-eclampsia, to which a quarter of all maternity deaths in Europe can be attributed.

I have visited Shanghai and while I was there I saw how they assemble research hubs. We, however, have not done this. We have six universities dealing with medical education. Would we be better off amalgamating and coordinating research to a much greater extent in our universities? Would we be better off with three medical colleges focusing on medical research instead of having six individual units? We must look at better co-ordination.

Senator John Crown: I welcome the Commissioner to the House. I am involved in clinical research and I am troubled by the track record and future plans of the European Commission in this field. In 2001, the European clinical trials directive was put in place that was widely seen by those in the field as a disaster. It achieved one goal, and one goal only - harmonisation. I am not a eurosceptic, I am a europhile, but harmonisation should not be a goal of its own. It only works when trying to harmonise things to a high quality. Making everything the same as it is everywhere else, when it is bad in other places, is not the way to do it, but it is what the

Commission tried to do.

Thankfully it was only a directive, although we did not quite realise at the time. We thought there would be a catastrophe but it turned out we could not ignore it because it was a directive, not a regulation. Now, however, one regulation is coming down the pipeline on clinical trials and another on data protection. Huge collateral damage will result. Two of the biggest advances in cancer therapy in the last few years could not have been achieved under the regime that will apply after the data protection directive is put in place. It will require explicit consent from people, which must be spelt out, for the use of their bodily materials for research purposes when many of these people are already deceased. The research has led to cures for some breast cancers and to huge improvement in treatment for chronic myeloid leukemia. It required looking at specimens from patients who were archived and stored. They were treated with respect and anonymised. I hope the Commissioner will give this her attention as there is a real risk of disaster here.

Senator Cáit Keane: Tá áthas orm mar bhean as Conamara fáilte a chur roimh bhean eile as Conamara, an Coimisinéir, inniu. Is as an Chlochán mé so níl mo bhlás chomh flúirseach agus atá sé i gCarna. Tá gach éinne i gConamara an-bhródúil as ucht an méid atá bainte amach ag an gCoimisinéir, ní amháin sa Choimisiún, ach nuair a bhí sí ina Ball Oireachtais, go háirithe as ucht an mhisnigh a thug sí do mhná na hÉireann.

I have one question mar gheall ar SMEs. We could consider innovation hubs for SMEs that have branched out from universities and are now on their own employing six to ten people. I saw this in Finland, where little clusters of businesses come together for innovation and research. We have priorities set out in our action plan, which is working well with the universities, but to paraphrase Senator Barrett, our SMEs are too valuable to let fail.

Senator Mary M. White: I am honoured to be here today. The Commissioner was previously a Fianna Fáil Minister, appointed by Taoiseach Charles Haughey, who had the vision to see that she would be an iconic politician as a woman. I am proud of and inspired by the Commissioner.

The elephant in the room is that despite all the positive results and economic development for Ireland when we joined the EEC, at the moment we do not look at Europe and the EU the way we once did. The crisis in the euro was very badly handled by the EU. Without wanting to be extreme, it has become like the communist structure it is so bureaucratic. The Commissioner's portfolio of research, innovation and science has been lost by the EU.

There is an area in this country that has been neglected, the full participation of the 53% of the country who are women. Twice as many men as women set up businesses. We have one of the worst records for numbers of female entrepreneurs setting up businesses that can export. I would like to hear the Commissioner's professional opinion, as a Commissioner and as a woman, as to what we can do to get more women to start up businesses because our only issue is to create employment for the people who have no jobs.

Senator Michael Mullins: I welcome a fellow Galwegian and compliment here on her tremendous work. Much has been said about getting young people more interested in science. That will be a real challenge. Is the Commissioner liaising closely with the Department of Education and Skills and the Minister on introducing science at primary level, instilling an interest in the subject at an early age?

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Ms Máire Geoghegan-Quinn: I will begin with economic issues that were raised in the earlier debate, as well as just now. If we are to win the hearts and minds of people all over Europe, and get them to believe as strongly as they did in the past in the European project, we must be able to show that not alone are we putting in place banking union, a single supervisory mechanism, an extension of loan maturities and an arrangement dealing with promissory notes, on the flip side of the coin we must produce policies that create growth and jobs. The Minister for Social Protection has successfully introduced a new scheme aimed at youth unemployment. We must look at the individual policies the European Commission has put forward and where there are barriers or too much red tape, we can cut that red tape significantly to make it easier for people to be able to access funding so the policies do what they say on the tin. Those are the challenges we face in the European Union at the moment.

When ordinary people talk about Europe, they do not necessarily distinguish between the different institutions. There is the European Central Bank, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers. Everything gets wrapped up together and people talk about “Brussels” being responsible for all of this.

2 o'clock

This is very difficult, as I am sure it is when a Member of Dáil Éireann or Seanad Éireann tells people down the country that Dublin is not responsible for everything that has occurred. It is very easy for people in the country to blame Dublin and people in Dublin to blame Brussels. It is important, however, that they realise that the Commission, under President Barroso, is engaged at every level in finding solutions to the problems faced by ordinary men and women across Europe, nowhere more so than in Ireland.

The Commission appreciates the huge sacrifice that has been made by ordinary people in correcting something they did not create and is seeking to find policies that can address the issues. As I stated, all the Commission's proposals have been put on the table with the specific aim of alleviating the problem and ensuring that what took place in the past can never happen again. We must never again have loose regulation. The Commission has proposed a proper banking union and much work is being done on this issue. People must show a little patience, which is not always easy. They need to realise that this will not be done by one organisation or institution but a combination of all the European institutions working together. What we are trying to achieve in Europe is to put in place the types of policies, structures and procedures that will ensure we take the best route forward to support economic recovery in the Union as a whole and in Europe in general.

The Government deserves tremendous praise for everything it has done, including the decision of the informal ECOFIN Council to extend the loan maturities. This agreement was a very important political development as it will facilitate a full return to the market and assist Ireland in exiting the troika programme. The Commission attaches great importance to the issue of a banking union, which was discussed again yesterday by President Barroso. Such a union would make possible direct recapitalisation of banks by the European Stability Mechanism and break the link between bank and sovereign debt. This issue is on the table and it is one the Commission supports and to which it is committed. An historic agreement was reached on the single supervisory mechanism under the Irish Presidency. Ireland assumed the Presidency at a time of great significance when important decisions affecting the future of Ireland and Europe must be made.

Senator Colm Burke asked whether fragmentation and duplication will cause problems. One of the issues of crucial importance to us in developing Horizon 2020 was the need to focus on what is known as smart specialisation. This involves studying a country or region, deciding what are its strengths and investing in and developing these strengths. I am responsible for another area of policy in the Commission, the joint research centre, which established a smart specialisation platform in its institute in Seville. Various regions in the European Union have worked in this platform to develop a smart specialisation strategy. As Senators will be aware, the Commission made country specific recommendations and noted areas where countries are weak and on which they must concentrate greater effort. This happens in my policy area and other policy areas.

This is the month of the brain, a proposal and policy that is strongly supported by the European Commission. I am frequently tackled about spending more research funding in health than in any other area. I make no apology to anybody for doing so because health research is fundamentally important.

I concur with Senator Crown on the clinical services directive. The directorate general for which I have responsibility and the joint research centre have worked with Commissioner Borg in this area to try to find a solution that is helpful as opposed to putting in place barriers or obstacles to research. Stem cell research, for example, is an issue that frequently generates considerable controversy in Europe. We have a strict formula in place which allows such research to take place under certain circumstances. This has not created a problem in FP7 and will not create a problem in Horizon 2020.

Open access is very important, as Senator Clune pointed out. The wonderful results of research must be available to be used for innovation and to develop and market technologies. Open access is the default position of Horizon 2020. We support both “gold” access and open access. Where one has significant public funding given over to research, the results must be made available for use by those who want to do so.

On women entrepreneurs, the Commission introduced an initiative to get girls more interested in science. We must also consider how we educate people as we have tended to educate them to become employees rather than employers. This is an area on which education systems across Europe are working. While the Commission does not have a competence in this area, it is an issue of which Commissioner Vassiliou has been highly supportive.

Agriculture and the Common Fisheries Policy were raised. The Commission is heavily involved in agriculture. For example, we published a new policy communication on the bio-economy last July, which will be of great significance. A sum of €4.5 billion has been committed to research in agriculture. Given that the role of research and research funding in agriculture was not widely discussed until recently, these developments constitute a major step forward. I work closely with Commissioner Ciolos in developing this area.

On the Common Fisheries Policy, the Taoiseach will be involved, with the Commission, in the launch of the Atlantic strategy at the end of this month. Although the European Union, the United States and South America have done significant research on the Atlantic, the findings have not been brought together. The new strategy attempts to do so. If we are honest, we will admit to knowing much more about what occurs above water than below sea level. There are so many opportunities and good projects being examined in this area. In Limerick, for example, research is being done on producing bio-fuels from algae. The area of medicines and so forth

also offer significant potential.

We need to do a great deal of work with parents to address the gap in knowledge between parents and teachers. To take a successful case, Galway has been holding a major science and technology festival for many years. Parents and schoolchildren of all ages visit the festival, which is held on the grounds of University College Galway and companies and researchers from the university and Galway Institute of Technology are involved. The event provides hands-on experience and deserves to be replicated around the country.

Cutting red tape was the objective of Horizon 2020. The strategy will create a single set of funding rules and one port of call and will be interpreted in the same way across all the services of the Commission. We received tremendous support in this from the Council of Ministers and European Parliament.

A major conference on the strategic energy technology plan, attended by the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Pat Rabbitte, was held in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham yesterday. The Commission is committed to renewable energies in all the areas to which Senator Leyden referred. Ireland is already involved in research into alternative energies and now has many opportunities to bring them to the marketplace.

Food research and novel foods are strongly linked to health. More money needs to be invested in certain areas of food research.

Crowd funding is another issue in which the Commission is strongly interested. As I indicated, the lack of venture capital in Europe during the crisis is a major concern for companies, researchers and so forth. A passport for venture capital fund is available and the Commission has done considerable work with business angel networks. We are providing support in many areas.

Close co-operation is needed in the area of education.

Commissioner Vassiliou and I are working very closely together on this. It is probably an area in which, if we had competence, we could do even more but there is much we can do by encouragement.

There is the most thorny issue of all, and I cannot finish without talking about it. Senator Zappone asked me what I thought about the Seanad.

An Cathaoirleach: The Commissioner will need extra time for this.

Ms Máire Geoghegan-Quinn: I thank the Cathaoirleach. That is very good of him. First, when one has to make a really important decision in life it is always important to have a second opinion. That is one of the truths by which I live. The decade of remembrance we are going through, the big moments in the State, is a time when we need to look very carefully at democratic accountability. Checks and balances are needed. We have seen this in respect of the economic crisis. It is also a time of checks and balances in the whole political system and political landscape. People will have to decide whether they want a diminishing democracy or a democracy that is enhanced. I hope we can have a debate in the country that is measured and considered, where people can talk in a very rational and calm way about the future.

If I may, I will talk about my own personal experience. For 22 years, as I noted, I often came into this Chamber in my capacity as a Minister of State or as a Minister. I remember the

first time I came here, with a consumer information Bill, as long ago as 1977 or 1978. I learned more during the discussion in this Chamber about the law and how it works than I could ever have learned in the Dáil. The debate in the Dáil was fast and furious and there were so many items on the agenda. When I came into the Seanad there was a possibility to tease out the legislation. There were giants here on the occasion of that debate, such as Ken Whitaker and Alexis Fitzgerald senior, who knew the law and could talk about the practical implications of what we were suggesting. I did something I believe few of my predecessors had done - I accepted amendments. I may not have been very popular with my colleagues in the Dáil at the time but I believe it was a good thing to do.

I valued very much the experience and the support I received here. One may look at the people who have been in the Seanad - I will not mention everybody - and at the contribution and the voice the Seanad has given, for example, to an area in I was centrally involved for two years, Northern Ireland. There were people such as Gordon Wilson, Maurice Hayes, Seamus Mallon, Bríd Rodgers. There was a depth of understanding they were able to bring to this Chamber in regard to the difficulties in Northern Ireland that could not have been brought to the other Chamber. That is something we must also think about in this debate.

There is, of course, my great friend, Senator David Norris. I am very disappointed he is not present today. We had many a tussle in this Chamber and many great robust debates. Very many people kindly mentioned what happened in 1993 and 1994, concerning a certain piece of legislation. Again, that was a debate that could take place in a real calm atmosphere where nobody was trying to score political points.

If Senators want a direct answer, therefore, yes, I believe the Seanad should remain and I will have great pleasure in coming home, whenever the referendum takes place, to vote "No" to the abolition of the Seanad.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank the Commissioner very much. I call the Leas-Chathaoirleach to propose a vote of thanks to the Commissioner.

Senator Denis O'Donovan: It is my great pleasure, as Leas-Chathaoirleach and on behalf of all the Senators, to express my sincere gratitude to the Commissioner for her very innovative - if I might use that word - speech today in the Chamber and for her very sincere answers to all the various questions raised. My abiding memory of her, when I had served in the Seanad for some time and when she had attended as both a junior and a senior Minister, is her tremendous bravery on many issues. Sometimes Ministers can cow behind the power of the backroom team. The Commissioner was brave and forward-thinking and had an innate ability to think outside the box on many issues. That is a great credit to her. When history will be written she will be seen as a Minister who took on challenges and did not flinch in times when it probably would have been easier to hide away.

I refer to the Commissioner's remarks on Senator Norris. I can tell her that, like good wine that improves with age, the Senator has become more robust and is still an ardent contributor in many debates. She will be glad to know he has not faded away like a shrinking violet. I am also very encouraged by the Commissioner's answer to the weasel question raised by Senator Zappone. Again, she has been very brave on that issue.

I give sincere thanks to the Commissioner and convey to her the good wishes of this House which go with her today for her future, in her current role as Commissioner and beyond that.

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Sitting suspended at 2.15 p.m. and resumed at 2.30 p.m.

Business of Seanad

An Cathaoirleach: I have received notice from Senator Denis O'Donovan that, on the motion for the Adjournment of the House today, he proposes to raise the following matter:

The need for the Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with responsibility for the Office of Public Works to provide an update on the protection and renovation of Castledonovan Castle, Drimoleague, County Cork; the overall cost and spend to date; when the project is likely to conclude; and when it will open to the public.

I have also received notice from Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh of the following matter:

A fhiafraí den Aire Dlí, Cosanta agus Comhionannas cé mhéad sealúchas atá á bhainistiú ag NAMA faoi láthair a bhíonn in úsáid mar ionad lóistín d'iarrthóirí tearmainn faoin gcóras soláthair dhírigh, agus na sealúchais sin a liostú.

I have also received notice from Senator Lorraine Higgins of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to clarify the employment issues associated with all Leader and community-funded schemes administered by his Department and if he will make a statement on the matter.

I have also received notice from Senator Deirdre Clune of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Health to implement a national dementia strategy in 2013 as promised.

I have also received notice from Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Education and Skills to address the urgent need for children with Down's syndrome to be recognised in their own right by his Department.

I have also received notice from Senator Martin Conway of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the process necessary for Mol an Óige, Steiner national school, Ennistymon, County Clare to be granted permanent recognition; the current status of the school in the process; the timeframe he envisages for the process to be completed; the number of schools that have been granted permanent recognition since September 2008; and the length of time it took to complete the process.

I regard the matters raised by the Senators as suitable for discussion on the Adjournment. I have selected the matters raised by Senators O'Donovan, Ó Clochartaigh, Higgins and Clune and they will be taken at the conclusion of business. Senators Ó Domhnaill and Conway may give notice on another day of the matters they wish to raise.

Seanad Éireann
Order of Business

Senator Maurice Cummins: The Order of Business is motion 38(10) on the Order Paper, Private Members' business, to be taken at 4 p.m. and to conclude no later than 6 p.m.

Senator Thomas Byrne: Today the country was greeted with the news of yet another broken promise by Fine Gael and the Labour Party. This was not just a pre-election promise but one that was made repeatedly in official statements from Ministers and the Government. That promise was on progressing the introduction of free GP care. The Government made a specific commitment to introduce free GP care for those on the long-term illness scheme. Lest we forget, people on the long-term illness scheme have conditions like diabetes, haemophilia, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, cystic fibrosis, multiple sclerosis, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, hydrocephalus and leukemia or are victims of Thalidomide. These people, who were promised that they would be included in the initial phase of free GP care, were landed with the bombshell that nothing was going to be done for them. Had they googled the website of the Labour Party any time since just before the general election they would have found multiple announcements on this subject. Every couple of months announcements were made on the issue by Ministers and repeated by Deputies and local representatives in their constituencies. It is a shame that this has happened. It is not right. The two key pillars of the Government's plan to develop the health service, which it gave itself ten years to progress even though we are not even ten years into the HSE, were universal health insurance and free GP care for all. They were interlinked. It appears that the entire edifice of the Government's health policies is collapsing.

I propose an amendment to the Order of Business to urgently ask the Minister for Health to come into the Seanad to debate the issue of free GP care, particularly for those with long-term illnesses but also for the population at large. As recently as the by-election in County Meath this issue featured on the Government parties' leaflets. One constituent told me he did not believe Government canvassers when they raised the subject on the doors. We need an urgent debate to provide clarity on this issue.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I remind colleagues that Labour Party Senators have tabled a motion on domestic violence for debate this evening. Senator Moloney will propose the motion and it will be seconded by Senator O'Keeffe. I hope we will have a good debate on the supports that are needed for the victims and survivors of domestic violence. Our motion is intended to enable a general debate while also homing in on specific actions that can be taken to ensure adequate supports and safeguards for victims and survivors.

When Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn was in the House earlier for a good debate on Horizon 2020 on the EU's commitment to innovation and research, Senator Colm Burke raised the issue of ovarian cancer. Today is the first annual world day for ovarian cancer, a condition sometimes referred to as the silent killer. We need to raise awareness about this cancer because 140,000 women die from it internationally every year. The survival rates tend to be lower than among those affected by breast cancer. In Ireland alone, over 370 new cases of ovarian cancer are diagnosed annually. I have been asked by three charities, Ovacare, SOCK and the Emer Casey Foundation, involved in this initiative to mention that they are asking people to wear a teal ribbon. I have plenty of these ribbons as well as leaflets on ovarian cancer for anyone who is interested. A research project into ovarian cancer is currently being led by Professor John O'Leary in Trinity College Dublin and Dr. Sharon O'Toole, the senior scientist in TCD, is coordinating the day. I am conscious of other initiatives in breast cancer and testicular cancer but

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we should also raise awareness about the aforementioned condition in light of its serious health implications.

Senator Feargal Quinn: I wish to move an amendment to the Order of Business that No. 17 be taken before Private Members' business. No. 17 is the Public Health (Availability of Defibrillators) Bill 2013 - First Stage.

When the Minister for Education and Skills next comes to the House we should discuss the issue of school holidays. I recently read an article on the steps being taken in Britain to increase the number of school days and learning opportunities for children. If we are going to build a knowledge society we cannot afford three months of holidays every summer at secondary school level in addition to Easter holidays, Christmas holidays and days off for parent-teacher meetings and other events. There is a need for something else to take place. Children could study a foreign language or allocate some of that time to voluntary work. A great deal could be done in developing different kinds of education. It is worthy of discussion and I suggest that the next time we meet the Minister we include it on the agenda.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I have previously called for a debate on banking, as have other Members on both sides of this House, but we have seen further worrying developments on the banking front. In particular, a proposal has been made during our Presidency that uninsured depositors should be bailed in so that they do not rank far ahead of other creditors. One can imagine what such a measure would do to confidence levels. I do not expect any kind of bank collapse or wind down but, God forbid, if such an event occurred I would worry about a drift of deposits out of the country. This proposal should be killed off because it represents an extremely worrying development.

The question also arises of the licences in the IFSC, to which Michael Somers referred recently. All of us know the importance of the IFSC to the economy, not to mention the capital city, given the thousands of jobs it provides. Three or four large institutions are handing back their licences. What is that going to do for the city and the economy? We urgently require a debate on banking and I ask that the Minister for Finance make himself available in early course. This is a beautiful area of the city thanks to the regeneration policies pursued by successive Governments, not least the current one. I do not want to go on about its importance but it is hugely important.

I would be remiss not to mention the young chicks in Killarney National Park. Dr. Allan Mee announced that whitetailed sea eagles were also born last week in Mountshannon, where a couple nested last year. I do not know what happened to the eggs last year but we now know there are young chicks in Killarney National Park. These are the first whitetailed sea eagles born in Ireland. This is an important development for tourism and Members are welcome to visit the lakes. I know where they are nesting and I will show them to visitors from a safe distance.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator should not count his chicks before they hatch.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I leave that to the Cathaoirleach.

Visit of Macedonian Delegation

An Cathaoirleach: I ask Members to join me in welcoming a parliamentary delegation from the Assembly of Macedonia led by His Excellency Mr. Trajko Veljanovski, President of the Assembly. I wish the members of the delegation a good stay in Dublin.

Order of Business (Resumed)

Senator Mark Daly: I support Senator Byrne in calling for a debate on the broken promise on free GP care for all citizens of the State. There has been a litany of broken promises on this matter. When these promises were made two years ago, those who put them forward were well aware of and well briefed on the financial situation. The promises in question were ones with those responsible for making them could not keep.

An Cathaoirleach: Is the Senator seconding the amendment?

Senator Mark Daly: I am seconding the amendment. The Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Ruairí Quinn, signed a pledge to the effect that he would not increase school fees. When all is said and done, he will have increased them three times. It is bad enough to break a promise once but to do so on three occasions is quite an achievement. We were also promised the creation of 40,000 jobs per year. If we have a debate on the broken promise in respect of free GP care, perhaps in its aftermath we might engage in a debate on the famous five-point plan. If my colleague opposite from County Kerry can name the five points contained therein, I will give him a prize.

An Cathaoirleach: Does the Senator have a question?

Senator Mark Daly: I ask the Leader to arrange a debate on the five-point plan and on those promises which it would never have been possible to honour-----

Senator Paul Coughlan: It is a pity I am not speaking after the Senator.

An Cathaoirleach: We are not discussing political manifestos on the Order of Business.

Senator Mark Daly: Those now in government promised people that they would get free GP care. This was despite the fact that it would never have been possible to deliver it.

An Cathaoirleach: Does the Senator have a question for the Leader?

Senator Mark Daly: I am seeking a debate on the Defence Forces. Yesterday, a Bill relating to those who deserted the Defence Forces and went absent without leave, AWOL, during the Second World War was passed by the Dáil. Earlier today, at a ceremony in Arbour Hill attended by the President and the Taoiseach, the Army was virtually excluded from its own church. The church at Arbour Hill is the church of the Defence Forces. For all the years that there has been a commemoration at Arbour Hill, the Army has been involved. However, specific orders were issued by the Minister for Defence that the Army is no longer to be involved in any way, shape or form in the commemoration ceremony-----

Senator Paul Coughlan: The Senator does not have his facts right yet again.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Daly is way over time.

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Senator Mark Daly: -----relating to the 1916 Rising and the leaders thereof who were executed. Why does the Minister for Defence, Deputy Shatter, dislike our Defence Forces so much?

An Cathaoirleach: Deputy Shatter is the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Senator Mark Daly: This is the man who described Irish neutrality during the Second World War as being morally bankrupt

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator is way over time.

Senator Mark Daly: The Defence Forces are charged with defending our country.

Senator Paul Coghlan: Not only is Senator Daly way over time, he is also way out of order.

Senator Mark Daly: The policy of neutrality during the Second World War was supported by the Minister's party at the time. Not only is he taking on members of the Garda, he is also taking on the Defence Forces and excluding them from their own church at Arbour Hill.

Senator Aideen Hayden: I remind the Opposition that the Government is just over two years into its term of office. We intend to serve our full term and there should be no doubt that our commitments in respect of health care will be honoured. On broken promises, I welcome the commitment - made at the launch of the Private Residential Tenancies Board, PRTB, rent index earlier today - by the Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan, to introduce the Government's deposit protection scheme in this House. When it comes to broken promises, those in opposition should remain silent until they see what the Government actually succeeds in doing.

In the context of the rent index, will the Leader make time available for a debate with the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Burton, on rent supplement. A number of concerns arise in the context of the rent index. While this index is a positive development, the difficulty is that it only provides details for those properties which are registered within the State. Unfortunately, a recent sweep by Dublin City Council of the "flatland" area between the two canals showed that fewer than 40% of the properties surveyed are registered with the PRTB. I am concerned that there are many properties at the lower end of the rental market which are not registered with the PRTB. The tenants who occupy these properties are paying under-the-counter top-up rents for them. The rents listed in the index do not, therefore, reflect the real rents being paid. In the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown area in which I live, according to the citizens information centres, CICs, not one property has been advertised at the relevant rent levels. This indicates that no one in the area is living in a property in respect of which rent supplement is payable. In reality, this is far from the truth. There is evidence to suggest that 50% of tenants are paying top-up rents. This has a real impact on the level of rent supplement being paid. This matter is important in the context of the discussions relating to the budget, which is due to be introduced in October, and I ask the Leader to prioritise it.

Senator David Norris: I second Senator Feargal Quinn's important Bill. In recent days we heard about a young person who died of a heart attack while on the field of play. Anything which can be done to prevent such occurrences would be extremely welcome.

I wish to mention the case of a woman who many Senators will have seen outside the gates

of the Houses. She is an Irish citizen who contracted hepatitis C from a blood transfusion when she was in a maternity hospital. She is not in receipt of disability allowance in this country and she receives no money in respect of the treatment which saves her life and which involves the use of interferon. She is obliged to travel to France, where she is in receipt of disability benefit and interferon treatment free of charge. It is a reproach to us, as citizens of Europe, that our own people can obtain better treatment from a foreign government. Will the Leader raise this matter with the Minister for Health, who, I presume, is the relevant individual?

The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade is meeting as we speak. There must be Senators present at that meeting because otherwise the bells would ring to inform us that it is not quorate. Our commitment should be to this House rather than to the committees. The Leader has made this point clearly and there are individuals who are not taking that fact into account.

I commend Senator Moloney and her Labour Party colleagues on their motion concerning domestic violence. I take this opportunity to ask the Sinn Féin Senators not to press their amendment to the motion. I usually stand with Sinn Féin in respect of its amendments but on this occasion I certainly will not do so. I am of the view that the amendment is foolish, particularly as Sinn Féin is agreeing wholeheartedly with the Government. All the amendment does is add in extra points which would be more properly made during the debate. If one is seriously interested in the issue of violence, particularly that against women, one supports a motion of this nature in order that it can be passed unanimously and thereby carry greater force. Causing a division which is clearly not going to succeed and which will probably lead to a situation where the number of people that will stand in support of the amendment will be insufficient will prove divisive. To some, it might appear to be grand-standing. I suggest that Sinn Féin Senators raise the valuable suggestions contained in the amendment in the debate on the motion rather than calling for a division in respect of it.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Norris is way over time.

Senator David Norris: Yesterday, I made a contribution in respect of the position regarding abortion. After having listed everything I said - although he did not name me - my colleague and friend, Senator Ó Murchú, stated: "I would not like to think that any of us who wish in the future to make a contribution in this House might decline to do so because we fear being misrepresented in an extreme way." I take this opportunity to ask colleagues to read what I said. I am of the view that they will come to the conclusion that I did not misrepresent anything in an extreme way.

Senator Michael D'Arcy: I wish to refer to the issue of enslavement. It was very difficult not to be moved by the television images which emanated from Cleveland yesterday. It must be remembered that some members of the Traveller community were sentenced to many years in jail yesterday in respect of the enslavement of men. I raise this issue in the context of the enslavement of women, however. Certain sources supplied me with figures which indicate that up to 800 women in this State are enslaved and that most of them are working in the sex industry. In view of the fact that it is 2013 and that nothing is being done about this matter, we should all feel ashamed. I was shocked when I learned that 800 women are enslaved in this country. I would like the Minister for Justice and Equality to come before the House so that we might engage in a debate on this matter with him. I am connected to Ruhama and I am aware, from the briefings it has given, that there is a change in the law which could be applied in this instance. That change would involve implementing the Swedish model, which, in effect, reverses the criminality relating to this matter from the selling of to the purchasing of sex. In

other words, the purchaser rather than the seller would be criminalised. This model has worked very successfully in Sweden. There has been no coverage of the fact that 800 young women are enslaved in Ireland. That fact is both shameful and shocking. If possible, will the Leader ask the Minister for Justice and Equality to come before the House so that we might probe the figures and investigate the matter further. It would be a major boost for the Seanad if legislation relating to reversing the position with regard to criminality in the sex industry could be introduced here.

Senator Kathryn Reilly: Will the Leader indicate if it would be possible to arrange a debate with the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources on the matter of inadvertent roaming charges?

3 o'clock

The reason I bring up this issue is that it has been raised in the Northern Ireland Assembly of late and there is a campaign around it. It impacts on consumers and residents on both sides of the Border, especially those along the Border regions. Deregulation is taking place at the moment in respect of roaming charges. It gives until 30 June to notify the regulatory authority to monitor and bring in penalties for service providers which are not advising consumers in respect of inadvertent roaming charges.

Yesterday there was a debate on EU scrutiny and the work programme. I went away to think about how we could discuss roaming charges in terms of the Single Market and current roaming regulations are something we could discuss as well. This is why I am requesting that we bring in the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Rabbitte. Of the four service provider organisations in the South, three are in the North as well. They are part of the same group of companies, they are sister companies and they all report to the same parent company. We should discuss roaming charges because it is important in terms of development along the Border regions. It affects businesses, ordinary people, families and it is something we should discuss in the House.

Senator John Whelan: It is with some degree of disappointment and dismay that I raise the issue this afternoon once again of narcolepsy sufferers and their families in this country. On the advice of the Cathaoirleach - which was very good advice and which I took - I raised the matter on the Adjournment on 27 September last year. At that stage the Minister for Health, Deputy James Reilly, indicated that the State was taking its responsibilities to these families seriously and was putting in place a package of long-term supports for the families and the young people who have been struck down by this distressing and debilitating condition as a result of the swine flu vaccine Pandemrix.

There are only 54 diagnosed young people in the county with the condition. It would not be an undue or heavy burden on the State or the Department to honour its commitments. I imagine the Cathaoirleach would agree, as would the Leader, that we need to ask the Minister for Health to come before the House at the earliest juncture and indicate why to date the Department of Health has abdicated its responsibilities to these young people, who live with an appalling affliction through no fault of their own. It is a lifelong condition that affects their career prospects, sitting examinations and long-term employment. There is a difficulty if we cannot have confidence in the replies afforded to us in the House by Ministers. I took the reply from the Department of Health at face value and as an accurate and honest response. However, nine months on, today, the families of the support group came to Leinster House and told us

that none of what was promised or committed to then has been adhered to or fulfilled. I thank the Cathaoirleach for bearing with me. I believe the Department of Health and the Minister should step up and support these families and young people. It would be absurd and immoral not to do so.

Senator Thomas Byrne: Hear, hear.

Senator Marc MacSharry: I support the amendment put forward by our leader. It is yet another instance of the haphazard, headless-chicken, sleepwalking approach of the Minister for Health when we see the fears that have been expressed by many of us in the House many times. There are 105,000 people on waiting lists throughout the country. One wonders what the special delivery units are achieving. They were announced to much fanfare. Every time one or two people are taken off a list a press release is wheeled out for all of us to see, but the figures do not lie: there are 105,000 public patients throughout the country waiting up to or more than four years. It is unacceptable.

Moreover, in the context of the north west of the country, where the main hospitals are in Sligo and Letterkenny, posts for a consultant dermatologist, a consultant geriatrician, a consultant neurologist, a podiatrist, epilepsy clinical specialists and several other specialties were all announced to much fanfare by the Government, but none of these are in place in line with the clinical programmes and no money is available to pay them. What will that do for the waiting lists in that area?

Recently, one dermatologist broke ranks and spoke to the media, which is unusual for consultants. He said that the waiting list he presides over was borderline unsafe. He has told general practitioners to stop referring patients because he cannot guarantee a service and there is no dermatologist in place, although the position was to have been filled some time ago. It takes two years to see that person. Further, as Senator Byrne has rightly pointed out, there has been mismanagement with the announcement that free GP care for all will not materialise. The IMO predicted this and stated that it could not happen for at least five years. Yet at lunch time today the Minister of State, Deputy White, was in complete denial stating that it would be in place by the summer.

An Cathaoirleach: A question for the Leader, Senator.

Senator Marc MacSharry: While I want the Minister to come to the House and attempt yet again to explain himself, I ask those in the Labour Party what action it will take. When will they acknowledge the level of incompetence? When will they say that they will no longer put up with such mediocrity?

An Cathaoirleach: A question for the Leader, Senator.

Senator Marc MacSharry: We want someone in this job who the public can have genuine confidence in, not someone who is running from Billy to Jack in a mismanaged haphazard fashion. The reality is the people know that the cover is there.

Senator Paul Coghlan: It is a witch-hunt.

An Cathaoirleach: I call Senator Burke. Senator MacSharry, you are way over time.

Senator Marc MacSharry: They are entitled to know that someone is at the helm who knows the direction in which we are going.

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Senator Colm Burke: I remind the other side that in 2003 the Hanly report clearly set out that-----

Senator Marc MacSharry: On the order of Business-----

Senator Colm Burke: I am simply reminding the Senator of it. I will come to the Order of Business. The report clearly set out that by 2012 there would be 3,600 consultants in the country, up from 1,700. At the moment there are 2,500, which is 1,100 short. That is the first point. The second point is that since we have come into power we have provided an additional 251,000 medical cards. By the end of 2013 some 48% of the population will be on medical cards or GP-only cards. That is a fact and it was not a promise in the election. We delivered it.

An Cathaoirleach: Is there a question for the Leader?

Senator Colm Burke: The question for the Leader relates to the debate earlier today with the Commissioner. She referred to Horizon 2020. I raised the issue of medical research. Will the Leader arrange a debate with the Minister present on the Horizon 2020 programme and how we, as a country, can get the maximum benefit from the research funding available under that programme? Following the comments of the Commissioner it would be useful to have a debate about the need for more joined-up thinking and co-ordination between all the people involved in this research area and on connecting the business community as well.

Senator Rónán Mullen: I welcome the Labour Party motion on domestic abuse this afternoon and I look forward to contributing to it. In particular, I am keen to know the Government's view of or attitude to a campaign that is under way, which seems to be justified. I am referring to a register of domestic abuse offenders. This is a project or aspiration of the Do or Die Foundation, headed up by a person from my area. I am keen to hear from the Government on this and it is one of the issues I will be raising.

It is difficult at the moment to raise the plight of schools and of those not well served in terms of provision for their particular needs. Whereas all children are special, there is something disturbing about children with special needs being left in sub-standard conditions. I imagine this is happening throughout the country but I learned recently of a school in Cootehill, the Holy Family School, which has not been included in the Government's five year schools building programme, despite being a priority for years.

I mention it because there are children with special needs in that area being educated in classroom space that includes an adapted storage room, the end of a corridor and part of a home economics room. There are students with varying degrees of physical and intellectual disabilities being taught in classrooms well below the recommended 70 sq. m. In fact, some of the classrooms are as small as 15 sq. m or between 15 sq. m and 28 sq. m. I mention this because children with special needs must be given special treatment. I would welcome an opportunity to hear from the Minister for Education and Skills on the next occasion he is here. He could sketch out for us to what extent the particular issues of special needs are being prioritised when it is being decided where to allocate resources and whether the existence of a significant number of children with special needs is taken into account in those prioritisations. It is very upsetting for many parents, in particular when their children move through the system and towards leaving school, to discover they may have missed out on facilities long promised.

Senator Jimmy Harte: I have some points of clarification. I agree with Senator Reilly about roaming charges on the Border. I encounter the problem every week travelling to and

from Dublin. I refer in particular to data roaming. Anyone who has switched it on while travelling through Northern Ireland would have paid the cost of a flight to California by the time he or she got home. It is totally ridiculous. Whatever about cross-Border charges on telephone calls and text message, data roaming charges should not be so high. They are a mystery to me. I do not know who works out the rates but everyone has had a bad experience with them. I agree wholeheartedly with the call to bring the Minister to the House to discuss the issue.

My second point concerns perceived broken promises. When any Government takes office it promises to look after the country and its sovereignty.

An Cathaoirleach: Do you have a question for the Leader? We are on the Order of Business.

Senator Jimmy Harte: The broken promise of the previous Government was the most costly in the history of the world, not just this State.

Senator Jim Walsh: That would be a useful contribution to your parliamentary party.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator, do you have a question for the Leader?

Senator Jimmy Harte: That is a broken promise. The promises to which the Senator referred are small beer compared to the broken promise when the previous Government was given a country to look after. It did not look after it; it broke that promise.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Harte, do you have a question for the Leader?

(Interruptions).

Senator Thomas Byrne: People were promised free GP care time and time again.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Harte, without interruption.

Senator Jimmy Harte: I ask the Leader to ask the Minister for Finance to come to the House to discuss the personal insolvency legislation, especially personal insolvency practitioners who are obliged to pay VAT on fees. That is not acceptable. People should not have to pay VAT on the situation in which they find themselves.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator, you are way over time.

Senator Jimmy Harte: I want to pay tribute to Alex Ferguson.

An Cathaoirleach: That is not relevant to the Order of Business.

Senator Jimmy Harte: We could bring him into the House to sort out a few-----

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: I would like to move an amendment to the Order of Business, namely, that No. 18 be taken before No. 2.

I refer to social welfare payments. Senator Heydon referred to the rent supplement scheme. Just over €500 million is spent on rent supplement. There has never been a better time to get some people into longer term accommodation. NAMA has hundreds of thousands of properties up and down the country which could be purchased at a very cheap rate. It is a great time for local authorities to purchase houses. We need to look at the overall spend in social welfare and whether it is fit for purpose today. Simple maths and common sense would tell one that when

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people are in receipt of social welfare payments, they are unable to obtain employment because they cannot work a five-day working week as their payments will be cut off. The current system in the Department of Social Protection has created astronomical waiting lists, in particular for those in receipt of carer's allowance and disability or other benefits. The current average waiting time for disability allowance is 60 weeks, but we all know of people who are waiting much longer.

Over the weekend I met somebody who has been waiting four years for a disability payment application to be processed. I met the family of another person who was waiting for a payment, who died last week. There is something wrong with a system like that which is not working. The Minister needs to come to the House and we need to have a rational, commonsense debate on this issue. The social welfare budget is approaching €2 billion per month. It is our largest item of expenditure, yet it is not fit for purpose. We all know of people who are receiving payments while others, who are physically worse off, are not and are being continuously refused them. Let us see if we can bring some of what we have learned to the Minister in order that she can make changes.

Senator Catherine Noone: I join with Senator Reilly in calling for a debate on roaming charges. It is an issue for this island and is something the EU could try to regulate to a greater degree.

I want to mention cash for gold shops and query whether the legislation is close to coming before us. The current situation is like the wild west where thieves can present different items taken from people's houses. They do not need to have any ID. They are given cash, but if they were given cheques there might be some traceability. One or two gardai to whom I have spoken are convinced that the cash for gold craze has led to a huge increase in the number of burglaries.

Today is the first world ovarian cancer day. It is designed to raise awareness of the disease worldwide. In an Irish context, between 1994 and 2010 an average of 376 new cases of ovarian cancer were presented in Ireland each year. It is very important to raise awareness because it has the lowest survival rate of all gynaecological cancers. Nearly 250,000 women globally are diagnosed annually with the disease and it is responsible for 140,000 deaths each year. Ireland fares quite well, ranking fourth highest in 30 countries surveyed, and has the highest mortality rate in Europe. There is much that can be done. The first step is awareness.

An Cathaoirleach: Are you looking for a debate on the matter?

Senator Catherine Noone: I am not necessarily looking for a debate on this issue. I wanted to raise it.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I join with Senator Noone in calling for the legislation to regulate cash for gold outlets to be enacted as soon as possible. Self regulation is not working and I agree there is evidence they are causing a lot of burglaries, in particular in rural areas.

Yesterday the Government approved the preparation of a new planning and development Bill which will establish a new planning regulator. The appointment of such a regulator was one of the most significant recommendations regarding planning made by the Mahon tribunal. I welcome that the legislation will come into existence.

Yesterday, in formulating the proposal, the Minister of State, Deputy O'Sullivan, said she engaged with a wide variety of stakeholders and believed that the new planning regulator will

improve the quality of planning in Ireland, increase transparency and accountability and, most important, increase public trust in our planning system. I very much hope the Bill does what she said.

Will the Leader invite the Minister of State to the House so we can ask her with whom she consulted on the preparation of the Bill? If reports we see in newspapers today and in national media yesterday are anything to go by, we need to ask how independent the regulator will be if the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has the final say on any recommendation such a regulator may make.

Senator Denis Landy: I support Senator Whelan in his call for some real action on narcolepsy. He has raised the issue over the past year, but despite promises we have seen no real action. It is time that those affected by it got results and a response from Government.

I ask the Leader to provide the necessary clarity for the Opposition on GP medical cards. It is quite clear the Government has set out its stall on the matter. It was clarified on the 1 p.m. news but, unfortunately, the Opposition Members either failed to grasp the situation or are attempting to waste the time of the House by calling for an amendment to the Order of Business and a debate. The Leader might take this opportunity to explain in detail why the Government has decided to pursue the matter of the provision of GP-only cards in respect of everyone instead of just a limited number. A commitment that this work will be done before the end of the Government's term has been given. I look forward to it. No naysaying by the Opposition will deflect us from this necessary work.

Senator Paschal Mooney: Last weekend, newspapers carried an article on charity shops that were having difficulty with marauding gangs stealing clothes from charity clothes banks. To address this spiralling disease, representatives of the shops called for sections of the Charities Act to be implemented and for new legislation to be introduced. Any Senator who saw the recent "Prime Time" programme could not have been anything but astonished at the scale of the thefts. People are being hurt, as the money collected by charity shops from the sale of used clothes and other products goes towards helping the most vulnerable in society. It is time that the thugs were taken out of the game. The best way to do so is by introducing and enforcing legislation. I would be grateful if the Leader passed on my comments. Perhaps he will respond.

I wish to bring to the Leader's attention a bizarre situation that developed in the national media yesterday. It was like a feeding frenzy. I believed that April fool's day had passed, but it appears to have an anniversary. Starting yesterday morning on national radio and in the national printed media and continuing until the news at 9 p.m. and "Prime Time", a subject with which Senators are familiar was featured, that of Irish soldiers who fought for the Allies in the Second World War. This subject was presented as a new story that had suddenly appeared, aided and abetted by the Minister. I do not blame him if a microphone and camera are put in front of him but, as all Senators know, the legislation was a Seanad Bill. It was introduced and extensively debated in this Chamber - as the Leader would testify, it was not an in-and-out Bill - last February.

Senator Paul Coghlan: And it was debated-----

Senator Paschal Mooney: The media suddenly woke up yesterday. Will the Leader ensure that Ministers and Departments, particularly the latter's press offices, give some acknowledgement to the work carried out in the nation's interests by this House? Of the journalists and

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editorial staff of the electronic media and the reporters in the printed media that carried the story two and a half months late, Mr. Michael O'Regan of *The Irish Times* was an honourable exception, as he acknowledged the fact that the Bill had been passed by the Seanad in February. This might seem like a trivial matter and I am not standing on my dignity, but if the public is to have any empathy with and respect for the House-----

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator has gone over time.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I appreciate that, but I had hoped that the Cathaoirleach would give me some slight latitude. In so far as it is possible, will the Leader please ensure that the work of the Seanad is at least reported accurately? He can only do his best.

Senator Terry Brennan: I welcome today's announcement by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Hogan, to the effect that he has sanctioned a Leader partnership to approve funding of €200,000 to Mr. Tony McGuinness to construct a willow drying and processing facility at his farm in Richardstown, Ardee. Under contract, it will dry willow crops produced in County Louth.

An Cathaoirleach: Does the Senator have a question for the Leader?

Senator Terry Brennan: Yes. The facility will also process these crops-----

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: The Senator wants to thank Senator O'Neill.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Brennan, without interruption.

Senator Terry Brennan: -----for use as fuel in commercial, industrial and domestic boilers. It is a great announcement for mid-Louth. The facility will increase the county's number of jobs.

One week or ten days ago, many colleagues heard me make a plea regarding the application of carbon tax to fire logs manufactured by Standard Brands in Kilsaran, Castlebellingham. I am pleased that the Revenue Commissioners and the Minister have changed their minds and carbon tax will not be applied. This decision will secure nine or ten jobs at the Kilsaran premises. It is good news for County Louth and shows that, on occasion, Ministers listen to Senators.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: *The Irish Times* has indicated today that a Bill on the abolition of the Seanad will be before the Cabinet in the coming two to three weeks. According to the media, the question presented to the people will be on abolition. There will be no option to reform. The axe is being well sharpened. Last week, I invoked Grattan and Flood. I re-invoke them in addressing my comments to the Senators opposite, who are concerned for democracy in this country and have no wish to see the bicameral system ended. They should be vigilant. This side of the House will oppose the Bill strenuously, but we will need some help from the Government side if this invidious Bill is to be defeated.

I support Senator Michael D'Arcy's comments on the enslavement of women. The horrible Cleveland story reminds us of similar stories from Austria and Belgium. Ireland has many cold cases, as the Garda calls them, of missing persons. Some cases date back 20 years. Most involve teenage girls. It must be stressful for their parents to imagine for even a moment that their daughters might be in situations similar to that in Cleveland. The chances are that they are. A prominent retired Garda detective is of the opinion that quite a number of people are incarcerated and being abused and slave raped as we speak. Will the Leader inquire into whether the

Minister for Justice and Equality will provide the Garda with additional funding to reactivate its cold case unit? An unsolved case is never taken off the books. The Cleveland police seem to have slipped up with the information provided to them. Vigilant neighbours could probably provide similar information in Dublin, Cork, Limerick or rural areas. There is probably always evidence. It just needs to be found.

Senator Eamonn Coghlan: At this morning's meeting of the Joint Committee on Transport and Communications, the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, made an enthusiastic presentation on the importance of sport. He referred to its morale boost, its health benefits for young people and the positive image of Ireland it portrayed abroad.

My representation is not necessarily on behalf of the people seeking medical cards. Rather, it is intended for those who are preventing them from seeking medical cards. Last year, I made a representation on behalf of TriAthy, which is a triathlon in Athy. One week before the two-day event, the Garda handed its organisers an invoice for policing to the tune of €5,600. They were disgusted, particularly given the fact that they only received the invoice a number of days before the event. The amount did not include the €1,120 required to provide refreshments for gardaí.

Having received a representation on the matter, I understand that organisers are trying to halve Garda costs this year by holding a one-day event. However, they have been charged 112% more, some €11,911. Of the 150 such events that take place in Ireland annually, some are charged and others are not. We are in difficult economic circumstances and Garda stations are closing throughout the country, but will the Garda or the Minister provide clarity on the policy for charging such events for policing?

Senator Jim Walsh: I second Senator Ó Domhnaill's amendment to the Order of Business that No. 18 be taken before No. 2. I refer to the commemoration at Arbour Hill this morning, particularly the fact that the Defence Forces were denied the opportunity to participate in the mass. This is the first year it has happened. I am reminded to raise this because on Easter Sunday there is always a commemoration in New Ross, which commences with mass in our parish church, and the colour party from the local Civil Defence is always in attendance. This year for the first time they were denied permission to attend and I understand that came from the Department or the headquarters of the Defence Forces.

I would like to get the Minister in here to discuss this because while it might seem a minor issue, it is part of a more comprehensive, aggressive secular agenda which we have talked about in the past. As somebody who supports a pluralist position in society, it is important we do not allow bigotry into this area. It is also demeaning to those people who gave their lives during 1916 and the War of Independence so that we would enjoy the freedom we do today and that we have the freedom to be Members of this House and articulate views and policies on behalf of the Irish people. That is something that should never be denigrated and, unfortunately, this is a step back from that. I ask the Leader to arrange that debate in the House.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: The history of how our State has treated women down through the years has been less than commendable and we should never forget that. For this reason I am happy to support Senator Michael D'Arcy's words this afternoon that with so many women enslaved in the Irish sex industry we should be moving on the legislation that will punish the purchasers of sex in this country. We have had good debates on this. It is equally offensive that at the future Oireachtas hearings on abortion, testimonies will not be taken from

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Irish women who have had abortions. A very clear message is going out that these women do not count. We should be very careful.

There is a great irony that we are prepared to listen to the medics, psychiatrists and legal people who, to be fair, are working at arm's length from this issue and that we are not prepared to listen to the women who are prepared to give their stories *in camera*. If we are ever to learn about the real reasons women are seeking abortions in this country, they are the people we should listen to. I ask the Leader to convey my deep concerns to the Taoiseach and the Minister for Health on this issue, and I ask the Leader to ask him to find a way to reconsider yesterday's decision by the Oireachtas health committee on this issue. We have an opportunity to get evidence that is missing to date and that will definitely complement the full picture.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I support calls by Senators Landy and Whelan on narcolepsy. Like both of them, this morning I met the families that are suffering from narcolepsy, and it is clear that not enough is being done for these people and that they are being frustrated in their efforts to achieve what they need to achieve. Although narcolepsy is accepted by the Department as a long-term illness, it is not listed for the purposes of qualifying for a long-term illnesses book. Only 54 people are diagnosed with this disease.

Senator Whelan had an Adjournment debate matter on this issue last September and in response to his question it appeared the Department was doing the devil and all to satisfy the needs of these people. However, nine months on, they are being stonewalled by the Department. Although it is an accepted long-term illness, it appears that if they apply for a domiciliary care allowance or disability allowance they are being refused, sent down the road of 12 months of an appeal process and then perhaps refused again. It is outrageous.

I was disappointed to see again that the promise of giving medical cards to people with long-term illnesses is being withdrawn. I do not see the logic in it. The new plan is to roll out medical cards to everybody. We are talking about a select number of people who have long-term illnesses, not the whole nation, and yet we are deciding to roll out medical cards to the whole nation before we deal with these people. It is time we had a debate on this and it would be no harm if the Minister would come in and answer questions on this issue, in particular about people who have narcolepsy.

Senator Thomas Byrne: Senator Kelly could support our motion.

Senator Maurice Cummins: Senators Byrne, MacSharry and others spoke on free GP care and the promises that were made. I assure the Members on the other side of the House that they have a flawed line of attack because the Minister of State at the Department of Health with responsibility for primary care, Deputy White, has said there is no change to the plan to deliver GP care in the lifetime of this Government. He also said he would deliver a phased plan before this summer on how to achieve this. I am very sorry to disappoint the Senators. That is the clarity the Minister has provided, and that is the situation.

Senator Ivana Bacik: Hear, hear.

Senator Maurice Cummins: The Government will honour the commitment given. That will disappoint those on that side of the House and throw a spanner into the works of their amendment to the Order of Business, but they are the facts as enunciated by the Minister of State, Deputy White, no later than today.

Senator Thomas Byrne: The promises have been broken.

Senator Maurice Cummins: I am very sorry to disappoint the Senators on that.

Senator Bacik asked for a debate on domestic violence and we will have a debate on that issue during Private Members' business in approximately 20 minutes' time. She also raised, along with Senator Noone, the question of ovarian cancer and the need to highlight and raise awareness of this issue. It is a very important issue about which awareness needs to be created. I applaud both Senators for raising that matter on the Order of Business.

I will accede to Senator Quinn's request for an amendment to the Order of Business to allow him to print his Bill and have it published. I note his points on the timing of school holidays and perhaps we can discuss that when we have the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Quinn, in the House, hopefully soon.

Senator Paul Coghlan raised the worrying issue of the drifting of deposits from the country. He also mentioned the fact that some banks are handing in their licences. I will endeavour to have the Minister for Finance or the Minister of State, Deputy Brian Hayes, in the House to discuss that matter soon. We have had a number of debates on the whole issue of banking and perhaps we can have further ones in the future. We all note Senator Paul Coghlan's points on the whitetailed sea eagles in Killarney and his invitation for anyone who wishes to go down there.

Senators Daly and Walsh raised the Army presence at Arbour Hill. There was no diminution of the Army presence at Arbour Hill.

Senator Eamonn Coghlan: Hear, hear.

Senator Maurice Cummins: The Army, as usual, carried out its duties in an exemplary manner in Arbour Hill, for those who were there at the ceremony. After last year's ceremony a review was undertaken by the Department of Defence as to how it could improve the ceremony. We had a ceremony with a guard of honour from the Army going up in Arbour Hill this morning, and it was done in a very dignified manner as we would always expect of our Defence Forces. There was also a significant number of Defence Forces personnel in the church and most of the celebrants of the mass were Army clerics so I cannot accept those ludicrous suggestions that have been made about the diminution of the Defence Forces in the celebrations this morning.

Senator David Norris: Hear, hear. Well said, Leader.

Senator Jim Walsh: One would not have said that in New Ross after Easter Sunday. There is a change in policy, despite what the Leader says.

An Cathaoirleach: The Leader without interruption.

Senator Maurice Cummins: Senator Hayden raised the announcement by the Minister of State, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan, about the deposit protection scheme and the issue of the rent supplement and properties not being registered by landlords with the PRTB. Dublin City Council found that 40% of landlords were not registered with the board, and I hope they will be prosecuted and fined. It is against the law to not register, and they should be brought to justice. People are living in appalling conditions in flats in Dublin and elsewhere, some of which are not registered with the board. The PRTB was set up in order that accommodation would be registered and properly maintained. Landlords need to be brought to justice if they are not registered.

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If I can get details of the case mentioned by Senator Norris, I will bring it to the attention of the relevant Minister. Perhaps he could table an Adjournment matter on the case.

Senator David Norris: I thank the Leader. Unfortunately, I did not get her name. She was outside but I will see if I can contact her.

Senator Maurice Cummins: Senators D'Arcy, O'Sullivan and Healy Eames raised the issue of the enslavement of women. Senator D'Arcy mentioned the dreadful situation we witnessed in Cleveland. More than 800 women are enslaved in this State. The Criminal Law (Human Trafficking)(Amendment) Bill will come to the House on 23 May. We also debated a Private Members' motion tabled by Senator Zappone on the matter a number of months ago. It will be dealt with and the Minister for Justice and Equality has asked the Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality to prepare a report on this issue. I understand the committee will report in the next few weeks.

Senators Reilly, Harte and Noone referred to data roaming charges, which affect communities on both sides of the Border. I will inquire of the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources whether anything can be done to address it.

Senators Whelan, Landy and Kelly raised the issue of narcolepsy and the need to assist meaningfully the 54 families affected by this disease. I agree with the sentiments expressed by the Senators, and I will seek clarification from the Minister for Health. These people should be looked after now rather than face further delays. I will find out the position from the Minister.

Senator MacSharry referred to hospital waiting lists. The number of people on the lists has significantly reduced from the number we inherited. When Fine Gael took up office, we set up a special delivery unit in the Department of Health, which has yielded wonderful results in many parts of the country. As Fianna Fáil would say, there is a lot done and a lot more to do. I heard that slogan used by its members on another occasion. Senator Burke pointed out that when we took office, there were 1,700 hospital consultants but that number has increased to 2,500. It is a significant result to have increased that number by 800 and our aim is to increase the number to 3,500. I assure Opposition Members, much to their disappointment, that this will be done during our term in office. Senator Burke also indicated that 48% of the people are on medical cards, an increase of more than 250,000.

Senator Marc MacSharry: The Leader should be appointed Minister for Health. His delivery is much clearer than the incumbent.

Senator Thomas Byrne: At least the Leader will explain what is happening. The Minister goes hiding.

Senator Maurice Cummins: That equates to the number of people who lost their jobs in the private sector in the three years prior to us going into government, which is significant.

Senator Mullen raised the issue of a register for domestic abuse offenders. That can be raised in the debate on the Private Members' motion later. He also referred to a school in Cootehill. The Government has undertaken a significant school's building programme and perhaps he can raise this issue as an Adjournment matter and elicit the information about the special needs provision in the school.

Senator Harte sought clarification on the personal insolvency legislation. We had a signifi-

cant debate in the House on it and if there is need for further clarification, I will chase up an answer for him if he passes on a question.

Senator Ó Domhnaill proposed an amendment to the Order of business about printing a Bill, which I accept. He referred to the overall spend on social welfare. We can discuss that in our pre-budget deliberations, but the Government is spending €1 billion a month more than it is taking in, which is a major problem. I agree with the Senator that it is disgraceful that someone should be on a waiting list for four years for the disability allowance. There must be a blockage in the system and I am sure he can find that out, but I do not know why anybody would be on a waiting list for this allowance. Has the case gone to appeal? If so, is it being held up in the appeals office? Why is it being held up? Those questions will have to be answered and, as an Oireachtas Member, the Senator should be able to elicit a response from the Department of Social Protection. I agree that a system that stands over a four-year waiting list is not acceptable.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: The system is wrong.

Senator Maurice Cummins: Senators Noone and Wilson called for legislation to deal with cash for gold outlets. I will ascertain the status of legislation in this regard.

Senator Wilson referred to the planning system and the appointment of a planning regulator. Perhaps I can invite the Minister for State at the Department of the Environment to the House to clarify what is happening.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: That is a diversion.

Senator Maurice Cummins: Senator Landy clarified the GP cards issues.

Senator Mooney raised the issue of charity shops and the theft of clothes from clothing banks throughout the State. He asked whether we needed to improve legislation. I will take that matter up with the Minister for Justice and Equality to see whether legislation needs to be tightened to prevent this happening.

Senator Brennan had a query about Louth Leader programme funding. Significant announcements relating to Leader funding has been made and that will benefit communities not only in County Louth but also throughout the country. I note his comments about the fire log factory. He asked that carbon tax would not be applied to the factory and his request has been heeded. I am glad several jobs have been saved in a local factory as a result of his intervention in that regard.

Senator O'Sullivan had a question about the Seanad referendum. I understand that the latest is that the Bill will be before the House by the end of the month and a referendum will take place in late September or early October. I note his comments about the cold case units and the need for greater funding in this regard. I will bring that matter to the attention of the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Senator Eamonn Coghlan raised the issue of sport in Ireland and the recent joint committee debate. I note his points about the triathlon in Athy and the cost of policing such events. I acknowledge that such bills are prohibitive for sporting organisations and charities. Perhaps he can get that information from the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport through the Minister for Justice and Equality to ascertain the position in that regard.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames asked about the Joint Committee on Health and Children. I

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have no intention of interfering in the work of that committee. The matter the Senator raises is one that can be dealt with by the chairman and the committee.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Thomas Byrne has proposed an amendment to the Order of Business, “That a debate on free GP care for those with long-term illnesses and the population at large be taken today”. Is the amendment being pressed?

Senator Thomas Byrne: Yes. The Government is breaking its promises.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator has spoken on the issue already.

Amendment put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 15; Níl, 31.	
Tá	Níl
Byrne, Thomas.	Bacik, Ivana.
Daly, Mark.	Bradford, Paul.
Leyden, Terry.	Brennan, Terry.
MacSharry, Marc.	Burke, Colm.
Mooney, Paschal.	Clune, Deirdre.
Norris, David.	Coghlan, Eamonn.
Ó Clochartaigh, Trevor.	Coghlan, Paul.
Ó Domhnaill, Brian.	Comiskey, Michael.
O'Donovan, Denis.	Conway, Martin.
O'Sullivan, Ned.	Cummins, Maurice.
Quinn, Feargal.	D'Arcy, Jim.
Reilly, Kathryn.	D'Arcy, Michael.
Walsh, Jim.	Gilroy, John.
White, Mary M.	Harte, Jimmy.
Wilson, Diarmuid.	Hayden, Aideen.
	Healy Eames, Fidelma.
	Heffernan, James.
	Henry, Imelda.
	Higgins, Lorraine.
	Keane, Cáit.
	Kelly, John.
	Landy, Denis.
	Moloney, Marie.
	Moran, Mary.
	Mulcahy, Tony.
	Mullins, Michael.
	Noone, Catherine.
	O'Keeffe, Susan.
	O'Neill, Pat.
	van Turnhout, Jillian.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Ned O’Sullivan and Diarmuid Wilson; Níl, Senators Paul Coghlan and Aideen Hayden.

Amendment declared lost.

4 o’clock

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Quinn has proposed an amendment to the Order of Business: “That No. 17 be taken before motion 38(10).” The Leader indicated that he wishes to accept the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Ó Domhnaill has proposed an amendment to the Order of Business: “That No. 18 be taken before motion 38(10).” The Leader also indicated that he is prepared to accept the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Question, “That the Order of Business, as amended, be agreed to”, put and declared carried.

Public Health (Availability of Defibrillators) Bill 2013: First Stage

Senator Feargal Quinn: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to require the owners of particular types of premises or venues to install and maintain defibrillators so that they are available for public use and to require such occupiers to erect signage and make information available online regarding the location of such defibrillators and to require the occupiers to provide training to persons on the premises; to require the maintenance of a register in each premises concerning defibrillators located therein; to provide appropriate exemptions from civil liability; to provide for offences; to empower the health and safety authority to supervise and ensure a compliance with this Act and for that purpose to amend the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005; and to provide for related matters.

Question put and agreed to.

An Cathaoirleach: When is it proposed to take Second Stage?

Senator Feargal Quinn: On Tuesday next.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction (Fixed Penalty Notice) Bill 2013: First Stage

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Sea-Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006; to provide for the issuing of fixed penalty notices in respect of certain sea fisheries offences; and related matters.

Question put and agreed to.

An Cathaoirleach: When is it proposed to take Second Stage?

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: On Tuesday next.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Domestic Violence: Motion

Acting Chairman (Senator Diarmuid Wilson): I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Alex White, back to familiar surroundings.

Senator Marie Moloney: I move:

“That Seanad Éireann:

— notes the incidence of domestic violence in Ireland and the devastating consequences that it has for both the individual victims and survivors and for the wider society;

— notes and commends the immense work being done to support victims and survivors of domestic violence by many State and non-governmental organisations;

— commends the Minister for Justice for his commitment to reform of the law on domestic violence; for his introduction of important changes through the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provision) Act 2011;

— further commends the Minister for recently securing agreement on the introduction of a European Protection Order; and

— calls upon the Government to support the Council of Europe Convention on prevention and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention);

— calls upon the Government to consider improving and extending eligibility for both Safety and Barring Orders to ensure full protection for those at risk from domestic violence; and

— calls upon the Government to endeavour to protect funding in this year's Budget for Domestic Violence Services and to ensure the provision of appropriate and adequate services for women and children at risk from domestic violence.”.

I welcome the Minister of State to the House. I had hoped that the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Shatter, would be here. However, the Minister of State is welcome.

I am pleased to move this important motion in this House on behalf of Labour Party Senators. It seeks to encourage a comprehensive debate on the issue of domestic violence, a subject which, in my view, rarely gets enough political attention and one which sadly remains a serious blight on our society, wreaking havoc in homes up and down the country.

Domestic violence is a crime, which involves various forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence or which threatens the safety or welfare of family members and persons in domestic relationships. There is strong evidence that this is an under-reported crime in Ireland.

Even as an under-reported problem, the statistics are truly shocking. Over 11,000 women and children sought safety from home violence in 2011, the latest year for which statistics are available from SAFE Ireland, which does invaluable work in the area of domestic violence. Some 11,000 in one year is over 210 women and children every single week seeking refuge from abuse and violence. The 2011 figures represented a 56% rise on 2007, when such statistics were first recorded by SAFE Ireland. Disturbingly, also some 3,000 children also receive support from domestic violence services in 2011. The data for 2012 will be available later in the year. As their chief executive of SAFE Ireland, Ms Sharon O'Halloran, has correctly remarked, the figures are a horrific and sad indictment of society.

It is only right that I would acknowledge the significant strides that have been made in this area in terms of legislation in recent years. I commend the Government and its predecessor for the provisions of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous) Provisions Bill 2011 which allow parents with a child in common to apply for a safety order regardless of whether or not they are cohabiting. It also provides that cohabiting partners can apply for safety orders without any specific duration of cohabitation required, however the specific duration clause also needs to be removed when applying for a barring order.

I also commend the Minister, Deputy Shatter, and his European colleagues for agreeing, only two months ago, a series of measures allowing for the mutual recognition of protection measures in civil matters across the EU. Significantly, this will ensure that a woman or man who holds a barring order against a partner can avail of the effect of that order if she or he takes up residence in, or moves for a short time to, another EU member state. I welcome this agreement as a clear statement that domestic violence and gender-based violence is unacceptable across the EU.

While I welcome these arrangements, there is much more that can be achieved. One of the key changes urgently needed in this country is a provision to allow a woman to apply at a weekend for an emergency barring order or protection order, something she cannot currently do. If a woman is a victim of domestic violence on a Friday night, she has to wait until Monday morning when the courts open to seek judicial protection from a violent partner. At weekends, when a barring order or even an interim order is being sought, we should put in place a system which would allow the on-call judge, in conjunction with the Garda, to arrange for the issuing of an emergency order to protect that woman until the courts open the following Monday.

This change would be a major relief for many women or, as the case may be, men who find themselves trapped in a domestic violence situation over the weekend, a time when incidents of violence in the home often reach their peak. I invite the Minister for Justice and Equality to revisit an aspect of the 2011 legislation. Couples living apart who have a child in common are protected under the legislation, but I am concerned the same provision does not exist for couples who have never lived together and who do not have a child. A member of such a couple, in an intimate relationship, is ineligible to apply for a safety order if a violent situation exists. This brings me to the crux of the problem. It is remarkable that domestic violence is not defined as a crime on our Statute Book. Nobody in Ireland can be charged with domestic violence. Nobody can claim in law to have been a victim of domestic violence. No official statistics about the extent of domestic violence can be gathered by the authorities because it is not a criminal offence in itself. It is only if a barring or protection order is breached that a crime has been committed.

An act of domestic violence is not a defined crime *per se*. The Council of Europe convention in this area, which Ireland has not yet signed, sets out the criminal offences which fall under the umbrella of domestic violence. It would provide a good legal template for the enactment of legislation in this area to specifically criminalise domestic violence in law. The Minister should examine the Swedish model. The Swedish Government has created a crime to deal with a gross violation of the integrity of a woman, which is a greater offence than a public assault and prosecution for which carries a sentence of five years. I encourage a comprehensive debate in the House, and in society in general, on the need to make domestic violence a clearly defined crime punishable by law.

I encourage the Minister, Deputy Shatter, to move up on the Government's agenda the Council of Europe's convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The convention is the most far-reaching international treaty to tackle the problem and sets out the ambition of achieving zero tolerance for such violence throughout Europe. Significantly, the convention recognises violence against women as a violation of human rights and means states are held responsible if they do not respond adequately to such violence. Preventing violence, protecting its victims and prosecuting the perpetrators are the cornerstones of the convention. To date, 29 out of 47 countries have signed it. Will Ireland make it 30, particularly when we hold the Presidency?

There is no disguising that the many services which cater for the victims of domestic violence are under financial pressure. At a minimum in this year's Estimates and budget we need to protect the statutory funding available to refuges and support services throughout the country. Alarming, in approximately 2,500 cases in 2011, services nationwide were unable to accommodate women because they were full or there was no refuge in the area. In my county, only six beds are available at any one time at the women's refuge in Tralee run by ADAPT Kerry, and these beds are often full. Only six beds in the whole of Kerry are available for people who need help. If an entire family moves in, it can be a week or two before they find alternative accommodation and thus the beds are unavailable for others who many need them.

I commend the work done by the staff of ADAPT Kerry and so many other similar services throughout the country on a daily basis. Staff are regularly confronted with traumatised, petrified and browbeaten victims of domestic violence, and the care and sensitivity they provide can be of immense support to the people affected. I also want to commend the many McKenzie friends who accompany women - and occasionally men - to *in camera* court hearings and help them through a very traumatic situation where they have to confront the perpetrator of the violence for the first time since the act was committed.

At present, many agencies which deal with domestic violence in Ireland are concerned there is too much fragmentation in funding and legislation in the area. There have been calls for a dedicated funding stream for domestic violence services as well as an overhaul of the legislative provisions in the area. The Minister, Deputy Shatter, is very dedicated to such a review of Government provisions and I suggest that now more than ever, at a time of economic pressure which can often lead to tension, stress and sometimes violence in the home, our commitment to legislative and funding provisions should be greater than ever.

There are many bureaucratic barriers for women trying to access State support when they seek protection, and a significant contributing factor to this is related to the lack of provision in housing legislation to address domestic violence. I will take up this issue with the Minister of State, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan, and suggest we should amend our housing legislation so domestic violence is recognised as a primary cause of homelessness.

I encourage my colleagues to engage in this debate constructively, and with the sensitivity it deserves. Let us park party politics and defend the families of Ireland who are the victims of this evil which manifests itself through cowardly domestic violence. My colleagues will deal with some of the other aspects of the motion, and perhaps at the conclusion of the debate I will have time to revisit some of the issues I have mentioned. I commend the motion to the House.

Senator Susan O'Keeffe: I welcome the Minister of State to the House. I commend my colleague, Senator Moloney, for tabling the motion and I am pleased to second it. It is an issue with which I have been much involved in terms of support and raising it. As Senator Moloney stated, it is an issue which does not get raised often enough. We are making a contribution today, not only through raising the issue again, but through asking and continuing to lobby for matters we believe are important to the very many women who struggle and are victims of domestic violence in Ireland today.

I am not very good at maths, but by my calculations every day approximately 18 women, and it is still mainly women who are affected, in the country go for help in some way, shape or form. This is a staggering figure. We tend to think in terms of thousands, and sometimes this stops us realising what we really mean. Very often, the women and their children who reach out for assistance do not receive it. When it comes to violence against women in Ireland we seem to surpass ourselves. We do not seem to be content to allow violence against women to happen, and as Senator Moloney pointed out it is not properly categorised as a crime, but we seem to have a hierarchy of treatment for women who have been subjected to violence and each level of this hierarchy is a new low. The treatment in the 21st century is still nothing short of disgraceful.

In this House and beyond we have wept and lit candles for women living and dead who were abused at the hands of the church, the State and doctors, some of whom were complicit with the church. These tears and candles were appropriate, but they cease to have any meaning in a society which still treats victims of domestic violence as if they were a cross between lepers and banished people. Whether the incidence of domestic violence is increasing or reporting is increasing does not matter a jot to the individual women who reach out for help. There are more now than there were five years ago but budgets are set to be cut again this year for the fifth year in a row. This cut in funding is not one which leads organisation to state they cannot manage. It has two very direct knock-on effects, as centres simply cannot operate phone lines as often as normal so they cannot pick up the phone, and they must turn women away. Last year the Domestic Violence Advocacy Service Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan turned away 31 women

who had to return to share accommodation with their abuser.

Across a great swathe of the country, nine counties still do not have proper refuge provision for women. These counties include Longford, Roscommon, Leitrim, Sligo, Cavan and Monaghan. Sligo now has one safe house suitable for one family, perhaps a mother and her children, and we may have another by the end of the year. This is all there is. Otherwise, if it is absolutely overwhelmingly urgent, people must be shipped out of the county and therefore lose any contacts and small support they may have had. I know of two children who did the junior certificate last year who were removed from their schools and sent to another county because of the situation in their homes.

We speak about terrible events happening in India to young girls, and they are terrible, but terrible events are also happening here to women and children and we seem to have stopped caring. When these women go home perhaps they hope it will not be as vile or violent as it had been, but of course every time it is just as vile and violent as it was before. I applaud the robust efforts of the Domestic Violence Advocacy Service based in Sligo under the stewardship of Niamh Wilson, because it has reached out and secured accommodation against all the odds, but it is not enough. Some women who have been subjected to violence have no claim to help. As the Minister of State will know, if they have a share in the family home, either as partners or wives, they are not allowed to apply for assistance such as housing support, emergency payments or crisis bed and breakfast accommodation.

A community welfare officer has discretion. They can try to use it, but very often they do not have any money left or they use their discretion and say to the women that, on this occasion, she will not get any assistance. Again, the woman and her children are returned home.

There is no clear and transparent process that a woman can expect if she finds herself in this position. Since she is in a relationship with someone who owns a house, that is deemed to be somehow or other sufficient. As a matter of urgency, we need the ruling on housing support to be altered in order that women who present seeking support and crisis accommodation can be treated as women who, effectively at that moment in time, have nothing and have been deprived of everything by the person who has perpetrated the crime. It is the worst sort of violence because they are being violent in the home, and when the woman presents for help, she is yet again the victim of another kind of crime, which is that the State says it cannot help.

If that was not bad enough, what about the women who fail to meet the habitual residency conditions? They cannot get help either. Even if they have a right to reside here, that does not give them any right to help if they need it. If there is a doubt about habitual residency, and let us face it that the system is riddled with the doubt option when it comes to habitual residency, these women are effectively hoping for some kind of charity or a kind hand. They have no rights.

There is this hierarchy and it goes on to those women in direct provision. Who are they? It seems that we do not care at all about women in direct provision who present with difficulties related to domestic violence. They are very often the women who are going to be victims of domestic violence. It is not enough that they endure incredibly difficult conditions in direct provision, a matter which many of my colleagues in the Seanad have raised, but when it comes specifically to domestic violence, it is the women in direct provision who are at the bottom of this appalling hierarchy of abuse where no help is being given.

We should not be proud of the system we have created, a system that at every level does very little to make real change for those who are the victims of domestic violence. Around Ireland, many people are working very hard to provide for these women. I applaud them, and I am proud to have been able, in some small way, to support the work that they do. I am delighted that Safe Ireland is in the Chamber today. We marked International Women's Day in the Seanad this year and last year with Safe Ireland. The Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, with Safe Ireland, launched the Safe application for Android telephones. I am proud to offer my support for the domestic violence advocacy service in Sligo and for the work that many people do in a very hidden way, but they are not solving the problem. They are not making a breakthrough and we are not making any progress. With budget cuts, all that is happening now is a kind of fire-fighting.

I know the Minister of State is not directly responsible for the matter but we are grateful that he is present for the debate. I know that he has enormous compassion and that he will join others to see if a way can be found in the next year to address some of the urgent matters that Senator Moloney and I raised. For too long we have sat very comfortably on some fence of shame, so to speak, when it comes to women in Ireland. If we really want to show that we have moved on, have learned lessons of the past and appreciate and value all women, then we need very prompt change.

Senator Denis O'Donovan: I welcome the Minister of State to the House. In contrast with the reticence of my Labour Party colleagues, I believe we should be proud and honoured that he is a former Senator who understands the workings of the House. I am sure because of his legal training, that he also understands in great depth and as well as anyone the nature of this motion.

Fianna Fáil supports this motion to help to address the appalling problem of domestic violence and the need to protect funding for this area. Violence against women in all of its manifestations and domestic violence is a deeply traumatising act that demands Government action. When Fianna Fáil was in government, it introduced a national steering committee on violence against women, established Cosc and launched the national strategy on domestic violence as part of a series of steps to tackle the problem. The Government should underline its commitment to the issue by signing up to the Istanbul convention and protecting funding for this area.

I would also like to place on the record that domestic violence is not a monopoly of or exclusively men against women, even though that is so in the majority of cases. In a minority of cases, regrettably, and I am aware of this from my experience as a Member and having chaired a constitutional committee that dealt with the family, there is also violence against men. When we are dealing with this, I would like the Minister of State to encapsulate that any kind of violence in the home would be condemned. I have understood from a number of people that the difficulty for men is that, regrettably, most are afraid to come out and admit that they have been either emotionally or psychologically damaged by violence in the home. While I accept that it is probably less than 5% of cases, it does exist. In some instances, I have no doubt it leads men to have suicidal tendencies, if not actually to commit suicide, because they cannot cope.

This was highlighted in a recent episode of "Fair City", a programme I rarely watch, although I have looked at it once or twice. A great deal of time was devoted in the episode to violence against a particular man. It went on for some time and the programme portrayed a lot of damage being done. Violence against men does exist, and without devoting too much time to it and while also acknowledging that violence against women is a major issue, perhaps the Minister of State in his response would refer to and allude to the fact that there is violence against

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men and ensure, in so far as is possible, that it is stamped out.

I come from a large family in current terms, being the youngest of 11 children and having the good fortune, or perhaps misfortune, of having seven sisters. When I was a child, my father, in training his sons to have respect for women, would often say to us that any man who does not respect and love his mother can never respect another woman. It may have been only an anecdote but at a time when we had no television - I was 21 before we got electricity where we lived - and where one would listen to the family chatting beside the fireside at night, these little aguisíns, as we would say, often resonated with me, and they continue to resonate with me that it is probably a fairly important matter on which to give young people training.

The Government must ensure it protects the funding for the area in the October budget. That is critical. Domestic violence devastates lives and households across Ireland, and without funding, initiatives to alleviate the problem will be crippled.

As I already mentioned, the Istanbul convention needs to be adopted by the Government. The Fianna Fáil Party has a relatively strong record in challenging the grave difficulties of domestic violence having established Cosc in 2007. That was a first step and a lot more must be done. Regrettably, domestic violence is an ongoing problem and we cannot say that if the Government does X, Y and Z, that will eliminate domestic violence. Unfortunately, it will not. We need to underpin the existing facilities. That is important, going forward.

Fianna Fáil has taken a lead in setting out a holistic cross-departmental response to domestic violence. The problem does not straddle one Department but crosses many divides. The first national strategy on the prevention of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence was published in March 2010 and incorporated the recommendations of the 1997 task force report on violence against women, which perhaps should be broadened to include men and women. The actions required to tackle domestic and sexual violence primarily cut across the justice, health, education, housing and non-governmental sectors. Progress must be made in the context of a common vision to ensure that those affected receive the benefit of a proper, overall holistic service. Integrating key groups is an essential part of ensuring an holistic approach in taking on the issue. The task force considered it essential that the national advisory committee would include representatives from the key organisations in the sector operating on a national basis, such as Women's Aid, national representative bodies for women's refuges, and rape crisis centres.

A tremendous amount of support has built up. I see this commonly in my constituency, where 30 years ago it would not even have been heard of. I see support groups in towns around west Cork, which would not have existed even 20 years ago. Such groups provide a listening ear for victims of domestic abuse, who are primarily women. Counselling is also available and not before time. It is a horrible thing to see a woman who is afraid to live in such an abusive relationship. I met a woman recently and we were chatting in the aftermath of a wedding. I know her background and she told me that for nine years she lived in a relationship - she was not married at that stage - where domestic violence was common. I asked her why she had not left after it happened the first or second time. First, she was obviously in love with the man, which I find hard to believe if he would pound the daylight out of her from time to time. Second, she was afraid that if she left she would have no support. That is an appalling vista. This happened 25 years ago but she is much wiser now. It is amazing that that could go on and still goes on today.

Some men are bullies and control freaks. They like to control women by putting them down

or, as they would say long ago, putting her in her place. Those days are long gone, however, and I hope women will now stand up for their rights. The basis for a good relationship, whether it is co-habitation or a marriage, is natural love, affection and a basic respect for the other human being. Once that breaks down things can, unfortunately, go wrong.

I appeal to the Minister to do everything possible to counter domestic violence. I support the motion before the House and there is very little that Senator Moloney or Senator O’Keeffe said with which I would disagree. I cannot do so. We can offer different political slants but this is an issue that society as a whole must tackle. We must be ever vigilant to what is going on. We will never have a utopian situation where domestic violence is eliminated but we all can, in our own way, be it politically, via Departments or otherwise, try to stymie the damage that has gone on to date.

In modern society there has to be mutual respect and a partnership, whereas 50 or 100 years ago that was not the case in what was a more patriarchal society. Historically in the Beara Peninsula, there was a Lord Beara, called O’Sullivan Beara. It is common knowledge that, according to historical anecdotes, he had the right in the barony to spend the first night with any newly married bride. That was accepted in those days, although it was deplorable. At least we have moved on from there.

In our day, there are intolerable situations which need to be tackled in any way we can. I am speaking on behalf of our party in support of this motion. I urge the Government to deal with domestic violence. Without funding, however, the necessary supports will disintegrate. The Minister of State should not allow that to happen.

I am glad the Minister of State, Deputy Alex White, is here. He is very understanding and his presence is as welcome as that of the Minister, Deputy Shatter. The Minister of State should tell his senior Government colleagues to maintain necessary funding for relevant support groups. Without such funding, things can start slipping, in which case women, and some men, will suffer again.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: The Minister of State is very welcome. I am delighted to follow on from the previous three speakers and support what they have said. I think it is fair to say that we will have unanimity on this issue in the House. Domestic violence is a serious local and national problem. Violence in the home is almost exclusively committed against women and children, though not totally. I have been working with COPE in Galway and have run fundraising events, including coffee mornings, for National Women’s Day. When I think of what the women in COPE have to do so that they are not identified, it is phenomenal. For example, if we had a photographer there, they could not have their photographs taken in case the partners of the women they were helping recognised them.

Those women have taught me what I know about this issue. Some of the women who came to those coffee mornings were victims of domestic abuse and had suffered, as had their children. Women and children are frequently vulnerable because they depend on a partner for money and shelter. Senator O’Donovan asked a woman why she had not left an abusive relationship. Sometimes they cannot leave because, first, they have nowhere else to go and, second, they have no money. They are completely dependent. As Senator O’Donovan also said, they still have a grá for the person involved in the abuse.

No matter what, people enter relationships, including marriages, with the greatest intention

of making them work, despite the fact that there could be grave problems with a partner. Dependence and lack of respect is at the core of this issue. We must take this on board. Senator O’Keeffe said that 18 women every day go for help. According to Safe Ireland, 3,000 children were helped in 2011.

The way the State has treated women over the years has been less than commendable, and it will take a long time to shake that record off completely. We are making some amends with the Magdalen laundries women, and the same applies to those affected by symphysiotomy. Yesterday, however, an Oireachtas committee held hearings and ruled against a request by women who have had abortions who wanted to tell their stories, *in camera*, about why they had to choose abortion. The committee said it did not want to hear those women. That is appalling. What have we learned? It took 40 or 50 years of abuse before we listened. I am glad of this opportunity to tell the Minister of State that the Joint Committee on Health and Children ruled against that matter. The Minister of State might bring that to the attention of the Minister for Health. Women who have had abortions have told me how voiceless and invisible they are. Perhaps they, too, have been victims of domestic violence.

I would like to cite some local, up-to-date statistics about Galway. In Galway city and county last year, 600 women and their children experienced domestic abuse. They were provided with support through refuge and outreach services. Some 86 of those women were accompanied to court to avail of legal protection. While that assistance is wonderful, it is an example of the scale of the problem in one county alone. COPE’s refuge in Waterside House was unable to accommodate 214 women with 319 children due to lack of space. Those families were offered referrals to other refuges. The nearest refuges to Galway are in Athlone, Limerick, Castlebar and Ennis. It is not always a realistic prospect for victims in crisis to leave their homes and all their supports to travel by bus to a strange city with which they have no connection. COPE Galway covers the city and county areas but also accepts referrals from other appropriate areas, for instance, if a woman has been tracked by her abusing partner to a local refuge and then needs to access safety away from the perpetrator.

Safety orders are welcome and it is also helpful that the Minister, Deputy Shatter, has signed into law a provision whereby the protection victims would have in other countries will now be replicated in their current country of residence. However, it is not helpful that cohabiting partners do not have protection, so that aspect should be examined.

I have been stunned by one statistic, which is that 60% of women who experience abuse in this country do so before the age of 25. This tells us these are young women. Something must be done in this regard. In his summing-up, the Minister of State might address what can be done. A subject called relationships and sexuality education, RSE, forms part of the social, personal and health education, SPHE, curriculum. That letter “R” stands for relationships and healthy relationships must be built among the young people. One must describe what is a healthy relationship and what it is like to be respected as otherwise, there will never be equality and the culture of domestic violence will continue.

Acting Chairman (Senator Susan O’Keeffe): The Senator’s time has expired.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: Finally, and I beg the Acting Chairman’s indulgence, I commend COPE Galway on having a new premises gifted to it by the Magdalen laundry within the past two weeks. In itself, that constitutes a renewal but the Minister of State should note COPE Galway now requires money for funding. More details will come to the Minister of State

and while this is good news, it needs money to-----

Acting Chairman (Senator Susan O’Keeffe): Senator, please.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: -----renovate in order that it can avail of the additional capacity.

Senator Jillian van Turnhout: I welcome the Minister of State to the House. I also give my full support to this motion and thank the Labour Party group and Senators Maloney and O’Keeffe in particular, who have proposed and seconded it. I can wholeheartedly endorse everything they have said. The first point I wish to raise pertains to the Istanbul convention, that is, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It has been open for signature since May 2011 and as Senator Moloney has stated, 29 Council of Europe member states have signed the convention but only four have ratified it to date and it requires ten ratifications to come into force. The convention is the first legally-binding instrument providing a legal framework to protect women against all forms of violence and includes obligations on the State with regard to prevention, protection and provisions of supports and assistance. It recognises violence against women as being gender-based violence and discrimination. It also recognises that equality between women and men is a prerequisite for prevention. Moreover, the convention obliges the State to address fully all forms of violence and to take adequate measures for prevention, protection and prosecution.

In preparing for today’s debate, I tried to work out the reason Ireland will not ratify this convention because these are all laudable and worthy aims, which everyone in this House has echoed thus far and which also are echoed within the counter-motion. My understanding is that Article 52 of the Istanbul convention, which is relevant to emergency barring orders, has some conflict with property rights under the Irish Constitution. I ask the Minister of State to elaborate on what precisely are the problems. As Ireland is part of the Council of Europe, why was this issue not raised when the convention was being drawn up? Can our laws be clarified to ensure its ratification because it is unacceptable to me that Ireland is not in a position either to sign or to ratify this convention? Consequently, I seek clarity and am all too tired of hearing that the Irish Constitution is a block to doing good things and to doing the right thing, as this is the right thing to do.

Previous speakers have mentioned the situation for women and for men. Given my background in children’s rights, I have all too often seen the direct effect of domestic violence on children, either directly or as witnesses to direct domestic violence. The Safe Ireland figures from last year showed that nearly 8,000 women and more than 3,000 children sought safety from domestic violence in Ireland. I will focus on that word, “safety”. I tried to put myself into that position in the context of looking the resources available and the laws in place in Ireland. Were one to be in a situation of domestic violence, the likelihood is it could be at a weekend. Addiction issues often are an intertwined problem, whether it be gambling, alcohol or drugs, and consequently they also can play a part. Where are the services and supports in respect of such issues? When one calls for the Garda to help, what can gardaí do? Members are aware of the pressures on Garda resources. Where are the refuges? Several previous speakers have mentioned the issue of refuges. There are none in many rural areas or where they do exist, they are being run by volunteers, that is, by dedicated women who have come together to provide a local support but who are receiving no support from the State. Moreover, the person concerned, who in the most usual case is a woman, must give a statement either there or within 24 hours. I refer to the facilities for so doing in an appropriate place where the children will not be a witness to

that statement. What of all these intertwining issues, including psychological and counselling services or safe refuge? Moreover, this should not be limited to the city of Dublin, as such safety and places should be available nationwide for those in an abusive situation who pick up the telephone. Such situations are not planned and while people might say those involved have their wallets or could check in here or could do this or that, such situations can arise.

I will counter by noting that in 2007, the then Office of the Minister for Children, which has been incorporated into the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, produced an excellent report entitled, *Listening to Children: Children's Stories of Domestic Violence*. What alarmed me in that report was that several mothers reported violent episodes while they were holding young children. This raises obvious concerns for their physical safety and child protection concerns. One mother of two children, who were aged four and six, outlined an incident in which she returned home from hospital with her newborn baby. As this State report notes, she stated:

He took to ranting and raving and screaming and shouting around the bed ... I was holding [the baby] in my arms and I was feeding him ... [The father] jumped out of the bed and he came over and he grabbed [the baby] and he had him out, like this, so that his little head was hanging down and his little legs were ... [it] was very traumatic for me because I sort of felt that I am a mother now and I couldn't protect my own child.

When such a woman seeks help, what are the resources the State has in place? How can such resources be ensured because it is known that domestic violence involves repeated victimisation? The woman does not necessarily pick up the telephone and get everything sorted out on the first call. Members are familiar with all the reports and the figures and it is a question of where will one will get help.

It also is a question of where should attitudes be changed. On that issue, I recently related a story on domestic violence to a colleague and am still stunned by the response. The colleague asked me whether they would not give the relationship a second go. This attitude must be challenged in society. I refer to suggestions that the woman should give the relationship a second go or perhaps was a little more complicit or perhaps had she the dinner on the table, it would not happen. As I stated, there are many countering factors and one must ensure the provision of adequate responses with both refuges and the wrap-around supports and services for the women and for the children. They also should be in place for the men whether they are victims or equally, are abusers. It is known that young children in particular have conflicting emotions. They love their dad and still want to be part of it. Is it safe that they are still there and will the dads be supported? This must be considered as a family issue and not simply in isolation. Consequently, I wholeheartedly endorse this motion.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Tairgim leasú a 1

To delete all words after “Seanad Éireann” and substitute the following:

“— notes:

the alarming incidence of domestic violence in Ireland and the devastating consequences that it has for both the individual victims and survivors and for the wider society and that according to Women's Aid, 1 in 5 women in Ireland over the age of 18 will experience physical, emotional and sexual abuse in her lifetime;

that SAFE Ireland recorded that in 2010 more than 7,235 individual women and

2,850 individual children received support from domestic violence support services. This represents over 40% increase in demand for these support services over three years with some services experiencing up to 35% cut to their funding during this period;

that according to Rape Crisis Network Ireland, in 2011 there was an 11% increase from 2010 in survivors and others seeking counselling and support from their specialist services, on top of a 9% increase from the previous year;

that the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre reported calls to the National 24 hour helpline operated by the centre increased by nearly 10% in 2011, an overall increase of 25% since 2008. This increase coincided with a further reduction in the statutory funding received from the HSE;

that it is essential that services that assist women in this situation are adequately funded to be able to respond appropriately. Refuge provision remains inadequate and many women and children are unable to access refuge accommodation each year;

that the Council of Europe recommends that there should be a target by member states of at least 1 refuge place per 10,000 of population, that Ireland is a considerable distance from this target, and that according to Safe Ireland on over 3,236 occasions in 2010 services were unable to accommodate women and their children because the refuge was full or there was no refuge in their area;

that the baseline prevalence study on sexual violence, the Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI) Report was published in 2002 and though has since acted as a key informant of Irish policy in relation to sexual violence, it is now considerably out of date;

— notes and commends the immense work being done to support victims and survivors of domestic violence by many State and non-governmental organisations;

— commends the Minister for Justice for his commitment to reform of the law on domestic violence; for his introduction of important changes through the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provision) Act 2011;

— commends the Minister for recently securing agreement on the introduction of a European Protection Order, but notes the considerable shortcomings in domestic protections for women at risk, and notes the failure, thus far, of the Government to sign the Council of Europe Convention on prevention and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention); and

— calls upon the Government

— to support the Council of Europe Convention on prevention and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) during Ireland's presidency of the EU;

— to improve and extend eligibility for both Safety and Barring Orders to ensure full protection for those at risk from domestic violence;

— to return the Budget for Domestic Violence Services to at least pre-budget 2013 levels, and to ensure the provision of appropriate and adequate services for women and children at risk from domestic violence;

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— to return funding to advocacy organisations working at a representative, policy and support level to at least pre Budget 2013 levels;

— to bring about legislative change in order to improve eligibility for safety and barring orders, addressing the lack of emergency protection when the courts are not sitting and particularly at weekends, addressing the need for guidelines to improve consistency on the granting of orders, addressing the protection of children from domestic violence in the context of separation and divorce, and improving legislation on stalking, particularly to take in issues such as stalking within a dating context;

— to ensure access to safe emergency accommodation for those experiencing violence, with a target of at least 1 refuge place per 10,000 of population, and resources ring fenced to make progress towards that target;

— to take action to ensure that there are adequate safeguards in Direct Provision accommodation centres to ensure that any potential for domestic violence is minimised, and to ensure that the residents of such centres have reasonable and effective access to supports and resources, including access to shelters where they are suffering from domestic violence; and

— to bring about a SAVI II report in relation to the nature and extent of sexual violence in Ireland and research into the economic cost of domestic violence in Ireland.”

While the motion tabled by the Labour Party is not without merit and while it would be difficult to disagree with it in the abstract, Sinn Féin considers that it falls far short of what actually is needed. This opinion is not drawn from my own thoughts but from discussing the issue with people who work in the area. When I showed them the motion that was being tabled, they were quite disappointed by it. While I can understand to an extent that the Labour Party in government is under certain limitations, one cannot allow such a motion to be debated without highlighting the considerable shortcomings that exist with regard to the protection of those suffering from domestic violence. Sinn Féin’s amendment outlines the prevalence and high incidence of domestic violence and violence against women specifically. Domestic violence against women is a particularly pervasive problem in Irish society, which affects approximately one in five Irish women. Since children are also frequently affected, it contributes to generational cycles of violence. Domestic abuse includes not only physical violence but also sexual, mental and financial abuse. It is a core cause of poverty and homelessness among women and children. One in three women who attempt suicide in the North have been victims of domestic violence. It has been estimated that perhaps as many as 44% of people know someone who has been a victim of domestic abuse and most people are reluctant to intervene if it affects someone outside their close circle of family or friends.

Domestic violence is a brutal, callous and cowardly act that has severe physical and mental repercussions. Everyone should have the right to feel secure in his or her own home and no one should be obliged to live under the threat of violence under his or her own roof. Austerity economics have exacerbated the position. As times have become harder, domestic violence rates have risen further, whereas vital support services are being curtailed by the Government and the statistics in this regard are frightening. I spoke to a professional in this area last week and asked what the main cause for the increase was and he replied that it was because men have more time.

The other issue that was raised is the anomaly in social protection, as mentioned by Senator Moloney, regarding housing. Many women who want to move out are unable to because the supports are not available as a result of anomalies in the rent supplement scheme. It would be an excellent idea to recognise domestic violence as a cause of homelessness.

In 2010, Safe Ireland recorded 7,235 individual women and 2,850 children who received support from domestic violence support services, a 40% increase in three years, despite a 35% cut to its funding over this time. According to Rape Crisis Network Ireland, there was an 11% increase in 2011 compared to 2010 in survivors and others seeking counselling and support from their specialist services, on top of a 9% increase in figures from 2009-10. The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre reported calls to the national 24 hour helpline operated by the centre increased by nearly 10% in 2011, an overall increase of 25% since 2008. This also coincided with the further reduction in the statutory funding received from the HSE. According to COPE Galway, as Senator Healy Eames mentioned, in 2012, more than 600 women and children were supported through both the refuge and outreach service, with 86 women accompanied to court for legal protection orders. The refuge, however, was unable to accommodate 214 women with 319 children and these were referred elsewhere. Specifically, there were admissions to the refuge of 140 women, with 131 children. Its outreach service dealt with 120 women provided with 303 appointments, while it also dealt with 128 drop-ins for women plus 93 children. We are talking about a situation that is close to crisis level at this stage, and there is an urgent need for action.

Internationally, while we are happy to commend the Minister on securing the introduction of a European protection order, we note the Government has yet to sign the Council of Europe convention on prevention and combating violence against women and domestic violence, the Istanbul Convention. The Government must ratify this convention immediately and there is an obvious conflict between the position of the Minister progressing this matter internationally but failing to sign Ireland up to the convention when so many of our neighbours have. The Minister must rectify this.

There is a need for legislative action. There must be a radical overhaul of how the law deals with domestic violence to ensure the justice system caters to the needs of abuse victims and keeps them and their children safe. We support the call by Women's Aid and other organisations for the Government to urgently review domestic violence legislation, including eligibility criteria for safety and barring orders. We must look at addressing the lack of emergency protection when the courts are not sitting. Clearly, there must be emergency and interim actions that can be taken to protect women at risk of violence. It is also clear that guidelines must be introduced to improve consistency in the granting of orders and the legislation on stalking must be improved.

Aside from legislation, we recognise there is a need for resources to be put in place. As we have noted, the Council of Europe sets out a recommendation of at least one refuge place per 10,000 of population. We are currently a considerable distance from that target. The organisations on the front line combatting this crisis are also under enormous pressure. They are now facing more and more people coming to them while their resources are being reduced year on year. We call for a return to at least the levels before the budget for 2013 and likewise call on the Government to ensure the relevant advocacy groups are equally resourced.

The motion also notes the need for a SAVI report, which I will not go into due to pressures of time, but I would draw attention to the situation with domestic violence in direct provision

centres. The women in direct provision centres have no control over their domestic living conditions and are particularly vulnerable when it comes to domestic violence. I call again on the Minister for Justice and Equality to deliver on his pre-election promise with regard to changing the direct provision system, which is degrading and inhuman, and could lead to an inquiry along the lines of those into the Magdalen laundries if the Government fails to act on those commitments.

We do not oppose this motion; we feel it does not go far enough. I call on other Senators and on the Government to support our amendment. We hope Fianna Fáil and our other colleagues will do that. We commend the motion but feel it should be strengthened.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I thank my party colleague Senators for bringing forward this motion and thank all Senator who have spoken, Fine Gael Senators, Taoiseach's nominees, Senator O'Donovan and Sinn Féin representatives.

I might comment briefly on the amendment but it was tabled in the spirit of a wide degree of agreement and support for the measures that are being taken. Senator Ó Clochartaigh said himself that Sinn Féin would prefer more to be done by the Government but we have said a lot in terms of the actions we are taking on this hugely important area.

Once again the Seanad has done a considerable service on this issue by placing it on the agenda and having such an informative and insightful debate. It is vital the issue of domestic violence is focused upon and debated publicly on a regular basis. By doing so we encourage those suffering from such abuse in its many forms to seek assistance. We also encourage those who are aware of others suffering abuse to help by seeking information. Most importantly, we must inform abusers, through these debates, that their behaviour is not to be tolerated by us as a society.

The motion notes the devastating consequences of domestic violence on the individual and on society, as well as noting and commending the work being undertaken to support those affected by such violence. The extent of the effect domestic violence has on society can be clearly seen from the number and range of State agencies involved in actions to address the issue. Six Government Departments, associated agencies and more than 50 non-governmental organisations are involved in work addressing domestic violence. The Government sector includes the Departments of Justice and Equality, Education and Skills, Health, Children and Youth Affairs, Social Protection and the Environment, Community and Local Government. The principal State agencies dealing with the problem are the Garda Síochána, the Courts Service and the Health Service Executive.

Since the establishment of Cosc, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, we now have a focus point to coordinate the State's response to this problem. Cosc is part of the crime directorate in the Department of Justice and Equality. With the participation of all the Departments and State agencies involved in this area, and with the co-operation and input of the non-State organisations providing services, it has developed a national strategy that addresses many aspects of the problem of domestic violence and sets out actions to prevent such violence. The strategy is the principal focus for the State's work on ending domestic violence. It overlaps with and cross references other national policies on elder abuse, child protection and homelessness.

Cosc sits on advisory and monitoring groups dealing with these issues. The national strategy

on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence 2010-14 concentrates on a better inter-agency approach. Improving collaboration among services is essential to providing better protection for victims of this abuse. The objective is to reduce the occurrence of domestic violence and, ultimately, to end it. It was always recognised, however, that there would be an increase in the reporting of domestic violence if the strategy was effective in bringing this issue more into the public domain. By highlighting that domestic violence is not a private matter for families to deal with alone, reporting to the authorities and seeking support is strongly encouraged. Guidelines devised by Cosc on awareness raising aim to encourage a shift from a focus on activities relating only to the victim, vital as this is, to an inclusion of a focus on the perpetrator and bystander, while also ensuring information on support services continues to be made available to victims and survivors.

The national strategy has four high level goals. It aims to promote a culture of recognition and prevention through increased understanding of the behaviours associated with domestic violence, raising awareness of what constitutes domestic abuse, including the supports available in law, and personal support measures as one of the primary areas being addressed.

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This approach includes the development and dissemination of information on service availability, better information between services and improving the availability of data on the problem. Cosc is working with national agencies to develop information across a wide range of educational establishments, including schools, universities, vocational education facilities and State services. For instance, I understand the Department of Education and Skills is finalising a module dealing with domestic violence to be given to junior cycle secondary students under the social, personal and health education, SPHE, programme to which a previous speaker alluded. This module is to be further developed for senior cycle students.

The national strategy also envisages the development of improved legislation in the area of domestic violence. The Government made a commitment in its legislative reform agenda to provide reformed and consolidated domestic violence legislation to address all aspects of domestic violence, threatened violence and intimidation in a way that provides protection to victims. Cosc is progressing preliminary work towards this commitment through consultation with State and non-State organisations, principally the national steering committee on violence against women and its legal issues subcommittee. The steering committee has a wide-ranging membership drawn from the relevant Departments and State agencies and principal civil society agencies. The national steering committee on violence against men also has an opportunity to make an input to the process. A bilateral meeting has also taken place with Women's Aid. The proposals for legislative reform will be progressed as soon as possible, having regard to the need for consultations and other legislative priorities.

In addition, the Law Reform Commission is considering, at the request of the Minister for Justice and Equality, a possible amendment to section 10 of the Non-fatal Offences against the Person Act 1997, which deals with harassment. This arises from reports of difficulties in bringing successful prosecutions for domestic violence under the section. The Law Reform Commission has indicated it expects to complete a discussion or consultation paper on its consideration of the provision in the first half of this year. The paper is also expected to address whether stalking should be provided for specifically in legislation.

The Minister for Justice and Equality has made important amendments to the Domestic

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Violence Acts 1996 and 2002 through the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011. The first amendment allows for a parent to apply for a safety order against the other parent of his or her child, even where the parents do not live together or may never have lived together. This amendment ensures the protection of the law is available where access to a child is an occasion of intimidation or even violence between disputing parents. The Minister has been informed that this amendment has been very well received.

The second amendment extends the protections of the Acts to same-sex couples who have not registered a civil partnership on the same basis as had previously been available to unmarried opposite sex couples “living together as husband and wife”. This amendment also removed from the provision a residency requirement that couples have lived together for at least six of the previous 12 months before an application for a safety order could be made.

Domestic violence legislation is contained in more than one main Act and, as with other legislation, amendments made to the Act are not automatically inserted in the published Act. This can make understanding of the protections more difficult for the person seeking those protections and those advising them. For this reason, it is important that the legislation be consolidated. The views of Senators will be welcomed, noted and acted upon in progressing this work.

During our Presidency of the European Union, Ireland has successfully negotiated an agreement with the European Parliament on the European protection order, a civil law measure which will ensure that victims of domestic violence and other forms of violence, harassment and intimidation can avail of national protections when they travel to other EU member states. This sends an important signal that domestic violence, harassment and intimidation are unacceptable throughout the European Union.

It is necessary to improve data on the occurrence of domestic violence and the outcomes for those affected by it, primarily women and their children. Again Cosc is facilitating work in this matter and the Government’s reform agenda will also be of assistance. Appropriate reporting of general information from family law *in camera* cases has a great potential to improve our knowledge base and provide valuable information on the operation of the law in this area.

The Courts Bill 2013, which was introduced in the Seanad in March last, will provide for the modification of the *in camera* rule, which prevents members of the public, including the news media, from being present in court when family law and child care proceedings are being heard. This proposal is in furtherance of the programme for Government commitment to reform and modernise aspects of family law. The Bill aims to provide for a careful balancing of the need for privacy for persons involved in family law and child care proceedings with the need to ensure access to important information on the operation of family and child care law in our courts.

Domestic violence is most often associated with spouses or partners. Violence by the male partner against the female partner is the more frequent occurrence, especially in more serious cases. There are also serious instances of women being violent against their male partners. Children are frequently caught in the middle of domestic violence and, as Senator van Turnhout noted, they sometimes become victims of violence. Physical violence is accompanied by psychological trauma when a child witnesses parents being violent against each other or one parent perpetrating violence against the other. This is an issue that often arises in the family courts in proceedings associated with separation and domestic violence.

As with all State and State funded services, our economic difficulties have undoubtedly had an effect on the level of services that can be provided. I note that many Senators' contributions focused on their concern about funding for services, which is perfectly understandable. Despite the current financial constraints, the Government has continued to provide substantial funding for services in this area.

The Health Service Executive is the primary funder of work in the area of domestic violence, providing the bulk of the funds for the operation of refuges and domestic violence support services. The agency allocated €13.89 million in 2012 to domestic violence refuges and support services, including the national network for such services, SAFE Ireland. I congratulate and thank SAFE Ireland for the commitment and dedication it shows in this area. I understand a national review of these services, which was carried out by the HSE, is due to be published shortly and will inform the future funding of these services.

A new child and family agency has taken on the role of the Health Service Executive in the area of domestic violence. Cosc liaises with the chief executive of the new body, Mr. Gordon Jeyes, and the national lead on domestic and sexual violence in the new agency. The child and family agency will come under the jurisdiction of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

In addition, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government provides funding for the operation of accommodation and associated services for homeless persons, including victims of domestic violence. This funding is known as section 10 funding. Some 90% of costs arising in respect of homeless services are provided by the Department, with the remaining 10% provided from within local authority resources. This funding is drawn down by local authorities rather than paid out directly by the Department. In 2012, a sum of €2.47 million was provided under section 10 funding for domestic violence refuges and transitional housing. I am informed that total section 10 funding for all homeless accommodation increased substantially from €12.6 million in 1999 to approximately €50 million annually over the past decade. While there has been a reduction of approximately two thirds in overall Exchequer housing investment, the effective maintenance of section 10 funding has meant there has been no reduction in the provision of services.

Cosc currently funds a number of organisations to provide domestic violence perpetrator programmes, with a variety of court mandated and other programmes in existence. The perpetrator programmes are delivered through a combination of community and voluntary organisations and the Probation Service. A total of 13 programmes are operating and in 2012 Cosc allocated to them almost €625,000 or 93% of their total funding.

Cosc also operates an awareness raising grant scheme which provides funding for local awareness raising campaigns that increase understanding and recognition of domestic, sexual and gender based violence. Cosc supports collaboration between organisations in raising awareness as an effective communication tool in that it provides an opportunity to reach a wider target audience to reinforce a common message. In 2012, it provided grants totalling €241,820 to 59 successful applicants throughout the country. Applications for the grant scheme for 2013 closed last week and are now being assessed. I take on board the observations and appeals of Senators with regard to the ongoing requirement for funding in this area. The point was well made by colleagues from all sides.

I will briefly address the Istanbul convention. Ireland supports, in principle, the aims and terms of the Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against wom-

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en and domestic violence. The national strategy is in line with the Council of Europe approach to a multi-sectoral solution covering legislation, co-ordination of services, awareness raising at many levels and data collection.

The national strategy is in line with the Council of Europe approach to a multi-sectoral solution, covering legislation, co-ordination of services, awareness-raising at many levels and data collection.

I can confirm to Senators that we have, in our Presidency role, supported the signature and ratification of the convention at international level. However, there is an issue for Ireland which we have brought to the attention of the Council of Europe during the negotiation process. It presents a particular problem which is not theoretical but a genuine problem from a constitutional standpoint. It relates to the issue of emergency barring orders. Although signature to the convention imposes no obligations on the State to implement any of the provisions of the treaty, Ireland would normally only sign those treaties that are compatible with the Irish Constitution, whose provisions may therefore be implemented. The Minister favours an approach to the convention whereby Ireland would sign only when it is clear we are in a position to ratify it. The proposed consolidated and reformed domestic violence legislation to which I referred may be an appropriate vehicle for some of the legislative changes which may be necessary to enable Ireland to ratify the convention. The issue of signature of the convention will be submitted for decision of the Government once this process has been completed, and any issues resolved with the advice of the Attorney General. It is unlikely, however, that signature will be completed during the Presidency of the EU given the present legislative workload. Some 29 Council of Europe member states have signed the convention and four have ratified it. It has not yet entered into force as this requires at least ten member states to ratify.

As Senators will appreciate from my comments, the Government continues to give high importance to the work to address domestic violence. It forms an important part of the work of the crime directorate in the Department of Justice and Equality but also involves and requires the attention of Departments and agencies across the board, including the Department of Health where I have the privilege of being Minister of State. An aspect that occurred to me in the course of the debate, to which I am sure we will return as we have had some very good debates on it in the past, is the issue of alcohol and alcohol misuse. There is no doubt there is a proven and documented connection identified between alcohol misuse and domestic violence. I know I and the Government will have the support of Senators in regard to the measures that require to be, and will be taken, on foot of Government decisions in the coming weeks. One such is that a public health alcohol Bill will finally be introduced in these Houses that will address the major challenge and scourge, if I may so describe it, of alcohol misuse. There is certainly a connection between that agenda and the one Senators are discussing today.

I am not sure if there were any other specific issues to which I wished to refer. For the record, Senator Healy Eames raised an issue in respect of the Oireachtas health committee. I point out that neither I nor the Minister for Health has any involvement in regulating or otherwise determining the agenda of that body.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Susan O’Keeffe): I call on Senator Kathryn Reilly to second the amendment put by Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh. I should have done so before calling the Minister of State - I apologise.

Senator Kathryn Reilly: I second the Sinn Féin amendment.

For many years violence in the home was seen as something that was nobody's business; it was a private matter between a man and his wife. What happened in the home stayed in the home. The blame game culture of blaming the woman who is actually the victim became too commonplace. As mentioned, there were questions as to what she had done, that she must have brought it on herself, she was nagging him, she must have provoked him, there was something going on, there was a reason. This was a very dangerous thread in Irish society and it is necessary that we move beyond it. It still baffles me that if I were to be assaulted on the street on a Friday night I would get better legal protection from my abuser than would a person abused in the home on the same night. I reiterate the point that was made and also referred to in the motion, which I cannot emphasise enough, namely, that the lack of access to emergency protection is a considerable issue for women, especially when the courts are not sitting. Many women's shelters and aid groups will report specifically that weekends are particularly problematic and that many women are abused on a Friday evening, for example, with the abuser safe in the knowledge there will be no court open nor any possible intervention for some days. That is very worrying, and is a frightening set of circumstances for those being abused.

Like Senator Ó Clochartaigh, when I was doing some research for this motion, I looked at local statistics and the accommodation status of new service users. What we find is a very high number of service users staying in the abusive relationship, which is worrying. We have to wonder if this is because there is no greater protection for the women. Do we believe the violence was a once-off instance? It is very worrying.

There are ongoing issues in terms of habitual residency problems for non-Irish nationals and those Irish people who return home after spending a period abroad. There are financial barriers in regard to living in rented accommodation without financial support for at least six months before becoming entitled to rent allowance. There is the issue of leaving the family home. If a person's name is on the deeds there is no entitlement to go on the local authority housing list. In addition, there is the ongoing threat of cutbacks and the impending publication of the review of domestic violence nationally, and what that will mean for services in the future. Senators mentioned that Sonas Housing Association reported that four of every five women seeking refuge have been refused because of the chronic shortage of emergency accommodation. We are not meeting European standards in terms of the necessary refuge places required, which is very worrying.

There is a story I would like to put into the debate regarding how we need to change societal attitudes and how this can start with public figures. Last year a rapper, Chris Brown, was to play in the O2 and an Irish band, The Original Rudeboys, was asked to support him. The band refused to do so because of his background of assault on his then girlfriend. The band's album features a song, Blue Eyes, which is about domestic violence. When asked to comment on why the band would not support Chris Brown at the venue, which would have been a huge gig for it, band member Sean Walsh said, "Domestic violence goes against everything we are about as a band. Supporting Chris Brown would send out the wrong message to our fans". Statements of this kind chip away at the old ingrained notions of domestic violence that are embedded in communities the world over. It is only when we take a no-tolerance approach and see it illustrated by prominent members of society that we will start to stamp such violence out for good.

I will follow up on some points made by Senator Ó Clochartaigh which refer to the motion and its call on the need for SAVI to issue a new report. SAVI, the Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland, made a report which was vitally important at the time as it offered a baseline measure and gave us an evidence base for policy decisions and approaches. However, the report is now

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11 years old, has become very dated and is rapidly dating further. Statistically, evidentially and policywise it needs to be updated so that we can have a clear picture on which to make evidence based policy decisions in this whole area. A report into the economic costs of domestic violence in Ireland, similar to studies in the UK, could also be considered as a useful measure to cost such behaviour throughout the State, reveal the amount of health care and policing time taken up in dealing with the situation and indicate whether preventive measures would be a far more economical way of using the State's resources in this regard.

I thank the Labour Party for tabling this motion. It is important that we put these issues out into the public domain and talk about them, and that, rightly, we try to chip away at the ingrained notions that exist. As Senator Ó Clochartaigh stated, we support the motion but believe it needs more debate which is why we tabled our amendment. I hope other Senators will also support it.

Senator Michael D'Arcy: Some time ago I did some research into fathers' rights. While I was trying to put in place a structure to strengthen the rights of fathers I kept finding myself stuck in the same position. Unfortunately, if there was a history of abuse, strengthening and codifying the father's rights effectively meant ensuring there was an abuser in the life of a victim. It got to the stage that I was not capable of advancing the father's rights because of that. I say this with the greatest respect for the Minister of State, who, I believe, would like to do something about this. However, not enough has been done on domestic violence. The abuse is mainly by males against females, while there is some abuse in the opposite direction. We need more analysis on where we should do more. I am glad that a group structure is in place under Cosc to advance that analysis.

However, we need most analysis in the area of the courts. I am told that some judges do not issue barring orders and because the courts operate *in camera* for family law cases, it is very difficult to know if any analysis is being done. That analysis should be done on the basis of how many judges are dealing with these cases and how many issue the orders. I am told that some members of the Judiciary will only issue a barring order if the offence is at the very highest end of the scale. I am not trying to cross over the area of separation of powers. However, analysis needs to be done to see how the Judiciary is dealing with this. At the moment there is an information deficit. If some members of the Judiciary issue almost no barring orders, analysis needs to be carried out. We need to ask why some issue much larger numbers of barring orders than others. I do not have the information, although it may be available to the Department of Justice and Equality. However, if it is the case, the question needs to be asked. While a safety order may be granted it has considerably less effect than a barring order.

In this evening's debate, I do not believe we have focused enough on the emotional and psychological abuse of victims. While the refuges are available they are not easy to get into because unfortunately they are full most of the time. I will not mention the Department's budget because I know every budget in the country is stretched to its limit. Some voluntary groups are doing Trojan work. There is practically nothing available for those people - primarily women - being abused emotionally and psychologically, and that issue needs to be considered. While there has been considerable analysis and discussion of physical and sexual abuse of children the third leg of that stool is the emotional and psychological abuse. There is also not enough analysis of such abuse of women and there are inadequate structures to ensure women have the opportunity to be dealt with.

Unfortunately for quite some time I have been dealing with too many cases of domestic

abuse. On every occasion, as a public representative, I need to ensure the appropriate authorities are informed. Sometimes that is not easy because unfortunately the victim of the violence might not want the Garda to be contacted, but there is no grey area and the Garda must be contacted. Depending on the extent of the abuse and the concern on the part of the public representative, the HSE may also need to be contacted. There is no grey area - it must be done. Even on occasions when the person who approaches me does not agree, I must do it. To do otherwise is not acceptable.

Senator Reilly correctly said that there may be more protection under the law for somebody who is physically abused on the street than there is for someone being abused in the home. When the Garda hear of a domestic incident it is very slow to get involved, which is not good enough. Because it is slow to get involved on too many occasions I know of gardaí visiting houses six, eight or ten times, which is not good enough. Abuse in the home - physical or emotional - is abuse. While I do not have analysis on this, it should be much clearer and the Garda should bring cases on the higher end of the scale of grievous bodily harm or actual bodily harm against the abuser. However, it rarely happens and it should be dealt with much more actively in the appropriate manner. If a person - male or female - is abused in the home the Garda should prepare a file and send it to the DPP. On too many occasions that does not happen.

As the Minister of State mentioned, drink is a major contributory factor. In my experience I always receive some complaints during holiday periods in the summer and over Christmas. It tends to be the case that too much drink is consumed by a husband who comes home and causes problems. His wife usually tries to keep it together for the Christmas for the sake of the children but unfortunately that does not happen.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): The Senator's time has concluded.

Senator Michael D'Arcy: It is important for the Garda to deal with this in a more street-wise way, which means that if abuse occurs in the home a file should be prepared just as would happen if the incident happened on the street.

Just to wrap up-----

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): The Senator is almost two minutes over his time.

Senator Marc MacSharry: I welcome the Minister of State to the House and I thank the Labour Members for tabling this motion, which we support. That is not to rain entirely on the amendment, but we feel it more appropriate on this occasion to support the motion rather than the amendment. I believe that Sinn Féin could usefully do the same in this instance.

When we were on the other side of the House it used to gall me to read some Government motions that commended and welcomed Government actions. I love the one from the Government that acknowledges our collective failure in an area rather than pats ourselves on the back. While there has been some progress much of it is superficial. We might have a committee on this, a steering group on that and something else on the other. However, this is another area where we are losing the battle. That is not to be overly critical of this Government or absolve any previous governments. It is one thing to have the report and the roadmap, but it is another thing not to implement it quickly enough.

Many Members talked about the number of refuges. One wonders what the issue is when

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we consider that in the north west where I live there is no refuge - although in these weeks there is the opening of two apartments to cover the Sligo, Leitrim and west Cavan area. While this is welcome it is a long way short of the original plan and what was hoped for or indeed what is needed to meet the demand in the area. I believe this is replicated elsewhere in the country. However, our problem is not with the supply of vacant properties and one wonders why an innovative cross-departmental team could not make use of these resources given that budgets are being slashed and it is a loaves-and-fishes exercise for all Departments. When we have all of this property available is it not possible to dip in and use it at least on a temporary basis for some kind of preferential rate and make it available to people? I know there are legal issues and challenges around that and I appreciate it is not that simple. There are a lot of intelligent people in Ireland, the Government, political parties and Departments who could come up with ways of connecting the boxes and the legislative amendments that may be required to facilitate that kind of flexibility, which seems all too foreign at times when it comes to Departments and legislation. We need to embrace that.

Senator Reilly raised the issue of people falling between two stools whereby the wife or, more rarely, the husband has to leave the family home in a situation of negative equity or mortgage arrears. Such individuals are not eligible for the housing list or rent allowance because the boxes do not connect. It will not cost anything to deal with that challenge. It is a scenario that arises despite the best efforts of housing officers and directors of services who want to help and may have suitable accommodation but cannot even make an assessment due to the rules and criteria. The Minister of State could usefully engage with the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in this regard. I do not doubt that the introduction of greater flexibility would present legal challenges in that somebody in a different scenario could argue for similar treatment. Nobody said it was going to be easy but it is an issue that we need to prioritise.

The question of funding is ongoing. I am involved in the domestic violence advocacy service in terms of chairing a group that is trying to advance the provision of a refuge. The service does brilliant work and, apart from the training it provides in the counselling of victims of domestic violence, 70% of its work is in the area of fund-raising and other activities separate to what it would prefer to be doing because it needs to earn the money to keep the lights on in its offices. It is, however, in receipt of some funding from the HSE. I do not underestimate the funding challenge and this is why I call for a more innovative approach to certain tasks. We have no shortage of offices, houses and hotels. Last Monday, while wearing a different hat, I went to see a hotel that is for sale in Sligo. The hotel contains 32 apartments and the guide price at auction is €150,000. If it is going to sell at anything close to that price, the HSE should be at the auction because the price is a steal in an era when we are looking for accommodation for refuges and social housing generally.

I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House for this debate and do not condemn him for his response. Similar responses were given when Fianna Fáil was in government but this is not a subject on which we should pat ourselves on the back. We have failed collectively in this area. I appreciate that the Government faces funding difficulties but we must be more innovative in our approach. The housing eligibility issue is crucial for women who have had to leave the family home and the issue of provision of refuges could be addressed by dealing with NAMA, even if on a temporary level.

Senator Mary Moran: I thank Senator Moloney for tabling this motion and welcome the representatives from SAFE Ireland and Women's Aid who are in the Gallery. Domestic vio-

lence is an abuse of power where one person in a relationship uses a variety of tactics to gain and maintain control over the other person. An abuser will use a variety of tactics, including physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, to retain control. Domestic violence involves a pattern of this type of behaviour, often over a long period of time. Many abusers' tactics are subtle and their impacts can be difficult to recognise. Sometimes they can be people who are close to us and we do not know what is happening until it is too late.

The statistics provided by Women's Aid are shocking, regardless of how many times one reads them. One in five women in Ireland over the age of 18 will experience physical, emotional and sexual abuse in her lifetime. In 2011, the Women's Aid national freefone helpline answered over 11,000 calls, 8,399 disclosures of emotional abuse, over 2,000 disclosures of physical abuse, over 1,000 disclosures of financial abuse, 477 disclosures of sexual abuse and 184 reports of rapes within relationships. A further 892 disclosures of emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse were made to the Women's Aid one-to-one support service in 2011. A total of 13,500 disclosures of abuse were made to Women's Aid in 2011, reflecting the growing incidence of violence against women in Irish society. What is even more shocking is the estimate that only 10% of those who suffer will access services. While over 11,000 women accessed domestic violence services in 2011, more than 100,000 experienced abuse but did not seek support.

I welcome the Minister of State's comments on the initiative by the Department of Education and Skills to bring a module into the SPHE programme for junior cycle students. Early intervention is the best way to cope with problems and if we educate our children to recognise and stand up to domestic violence, we can reduce the problem for future generations.

Research indicates that people are generally reluctant to intervene in other people's business. People say they would only intervene if they witnessed abuse or knew a relative who was being abused. We only have to consider recent events in Cleveland, Ohio, to understand that the abuse occurred in a house whose occupant socialised with neighbours. Abuse can often be cleverly disguised. People do not want to step into the intimate arena of other relationships because they do not want to judge the woman and her choices or because they fear they will make matters worse.

The woman concerned may believe she still loves the man and she may have children or other economic dependents. Even in this day and age enormous social pressure is often brought to bear on a woman to avoid breaking up the family. She may feel shame at being in her situation and, as other speakers have noted, the sexist attitude remains in Irish society that she made her bed and must lie in it. Women who experience abuse often minimise it and do not believe their case is bad enough to report or do not think they will be believed. They may repeatedly dismiss incidents as once-off events or make excuses for the perpetrator.

As citizens, we have to say that domestic violence is not acceptable. It will remain pervasive as long as silence surrounds it but it will wither with knowledge and disclosure. I acknowledge that the Government has been proactive in supporting State and non-government organisations in their efforts to assist victims and survivors of domestic violence. The Man UP campaign, supported by SAFE Ireland, is one such initiative which, for the first time, switches the focus from the needs and views of survivors, most of whom are women and children, to the actions and words of those who control and abuse, most of whom are men. The idea behind this campaign is to try to get the message across that most men celebrate and protect women and that behaviour which is controlling and abusive is just not acceptable.

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Despite everything to which I refer, there is so much more to be done. In Dundalk, where I live, some 219 people availed of support services in 2012 but a further 225 requests for help went unanswered. Those who run the support services in Dundalk estimate that 115 people have already been refused assistance in 2013. They are of the view that this will climb to 300 during the remainder of the year. It takes a great deal of courage for people to come forward. When they do find that courage, it is a major setback for them to be told that there is no help available. The Minister of State referred to the funding that is available. However, there is a great deal more which must be done. As previous speakers stated, it is important that the level of funding be maintained in the forthcoming budget.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator must conclude.

Senator Mary Moran: I thank the Cathaoirleach. I just need one more minute.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator is way over time.

Senator Mary Moran: The Minister of State indicated that the convention will not be signed, which is both unfortunate and regrettable. I hope we will be able to rectify that soon.

Senator Aideen Hayden: I am going to confine my comments to the housing issues which arise for women and children who are the victims of domestic violence.

An Cathaoirleach: I apologise for interrupting but this is supposed to be Senator Keane's speaking slot.

Senator Cáit Keane: That is okay. I will speak after the Senator.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Hayden may continue.

Senator Aideen Hayden: I have worked in the field of housing and homelessness for a number of years. I am aware that among the main difficulties faced by women who experience domestic violence is not just the challenge of leaving their homes but also that of remaining outside them once they find the courage to depart. The way we deal with women and children who experience domestic violence in the context of the housing system is part of the reason they find it difficult to leave their homes and move into the mainstream secure housing market as quickly as possible. In recent years, there has been a lack of good quality and substantive research on the specific issue of housing and its availability. The main report in this regard dates back to 2008. However, the findings it contains are as relevant now as they were then. The report in question indicates that aside from the difficulty women face in the context of accessing emergency accommodation - their experience in this regard is particularly variable and depends on the part of the country in which they live - they also encounter other problems which relate to the local authority area in which they reside. While some local authorities have specific customs and practices which would be defined as being well organised, others do not.

The response received by people with a housing need when they approach their local authority varies considerably. There are a number of reasons for this. The first is because domestic violence is not specifically defined within the housing legislation. I take this opportunity to raise an issue with the Minister of State. The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 contains a provision whereby, for the sake of argument, there is a disregard for lone parents in respect of their existing housing conditions. This means that if such parents are living at home with one or other or both of their parents, they are not deemed to be adequately housed purely because they

have housing available to them. I request that a similar disregard should be applied to women who are the victims of domestic violence. As a result of the fact that such women may often be the co-owners of their homes or may have an interest in a rented property by virtue of the fact that they are joint or co-tenants, their position is difficult to assess in housing terms. This is particularly true in the context of their ability to access social housing. A disregard similar to that which applies in the case of lone parents could be extremely beneficial in the context of dealing with the specific needs of women who experience violence. It would, for example, allow them to be assessed as being in need of housing at the earliest possible opportunity.

One of the main difficulties faced by women in situations of domestic abuse is that they require an immediate response from the authorities and they need to be provided with safe housing. In terms of what is available to these women, I am aware, from my dealings with the rented market, that one of the other problems they face relates to the length of time it takes for them to be granted rent supplement. A potential way to deal with this would be for a ministerial directive to be issued to community welfare officers, CWOs, giving them specific discretion to deal with the needs of women who are the subject of domestic violence. CWOs can exercise such discretion at present but they can only do so if they provide a direct explanation to the Minister as to their reasons for doing so. If one is obliged to explain to a Minister why one is exercising one's discretion, one is not going to exercise it very often. My proposal for a ministerial directive represents a practical way in which women who experience domestic violence could be assisted by the system in obtaining secure housing as quickly as possible.

In light of the current housing crisis, the women to whom I refer are experiencing particular problems. In essence, these women find themselves in family and housing situations which are unsustainable. The needs of women and children who are the subject of domestic violence must be taken into account in the context of the overall position with regard to mortgage arrears, etc. The code of conduct in respect of mortgage arrears must take into account that relationship breakdowns occur. It must also take cognisance of the particular circumstances of those who are involved in such breakdowns and who are experiencing domestic violence.

In the context of the 1997 legislation on anti-social behaviour, there is a need for clarity as to what constitutes such behaviour. Some local authorities have used the relevant provision in the legislation to exclude violent spouses. In effect, others have used it to make both spouses homeless. There is a need to re-examine the legislation on housing in particular to discover how it might be changed to facilitate the transition to secure housing - as quickly as possible - for women and children who experience domestic violence.

An Cathaoirleach: I apologise to Senator Keane for not calling her earlier.

Senator Cáit Keane: There is no problem. I welcome the Minister of State. This is an extremely important debate. There is not enough discussion of domestic violence, which takes so many forms and which affects those of all social classes. I accept that it may affect one social class more than another but it obtains across the board. Domestic violence takes many forms. A person, for example, might not have a black eye but she may be suffering this type of violence, which can often be hidden and which can take many forms such as verbal abuse, financial abuse, denial of contact with family or friends, etc. We are all familiar with the film "The Field" and the silent treatment meted out across the kitchen table by the main character. That is a form of abuse which is hidden from view. People are often too afraid to speak up about being abused and are not aware of the supports that may be available to them. Senator O'Keeffe was very eloquent when referring to the many services which could be made available but which are not

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currently available. We all recognise the position in this regard. The Minister of State referred to the four goals and the strategy relating to prevention. A great deal is being done but there is also much more to do.

A previous speaker referred to gardaí visiting particular homes nine or ten times and seeking witnesses because it is often a case of taking the word of one spouse or partner against that of the other. Women can sometimes be at a particular disadvantage if the witness's statement is taken in front of the abuser. There is a need for privacy in this regard.

Women always want to protect their children and will go to great lengths in the context of suffering abuse for the sake of their families. People must be made aware that there are services of which they can avail and that their children will be protected and will be able to continue to attend school. There is no point in informing a person who has suffered abuse that the local refuge is full and that she can try the refuge in the neighbouring county. If the child cannot continue with friends, family and school it will stop a person taking up an offer of availability in another refuge. We need to consider all of these issues and see how to address them.

It is often the case that all people are looking for is a safe house. I realise we would prefer all services with bells on them, including counselling and whatever, but initially a basic safe house may be enough in circumstances where a woman is abused. I acknowledge the abuse of men as well because there are circumstances of male abuse but predominately it is a case of the abuse of women. What is needed is a safe house where a person can go to hide away for a period of two or three weeks until the main services are available. Often this is what people are looking for.

The Minister of State referred to the various changes in the Domestic Violence Acts 1996 and 2000 which the Minister with responsibility for justice has brought forward. The Minister of State has referred to these and therefore I will not dwell on them. The Minister referred to the second amendment of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011 which extends protection to same-sex couples. I welcome the fact that Ireland has successfully negotiated an agreement with the European Parliament on the European protection order, a civil law measure which will ensure that victims of domestic violence and other forms of violent harassment and intimidation can avail of national protection when they travel to other member states. This was one of the difficulties. Some time back the Immigrant Council of Ireland referred to this issue and the arrangements have been changed and I welcome that. The Minister of State also referred to the Courts Bill 2013.

I acknowledge the work of non-governmental organisations. There are two representatives in the Visitors Gallery today from Women's Aid and SAFE Ireland. I acknowledge all of the work that has been done by them, often on a wing and a prayer. The Minister of State made reference to guaranteed funding for various organisations. Organisations must make five-year plans for funding the facilities they will be able to make available either by way of counselling or education and all of the things we want to do and which are in the programme for Government. Non-governmental organisations play a major role in ensuring that these services are put in place. The Saoirse Women's Refuge in Tallaght plays a great role in this regard. These organisations need to be assured that the funding they receive today will continue tomorrow and in five years' time in order that they can plan. I am not referring to the services that we should be making available, including further safe houses and so on.

Other speakers have referred to the signing of the Istanbul convention at the Council of

Europe. There is no point in signing or ratifying a convention and then leaving it on the shelf if a country cannot put it into play. The convention is to be welcomed but we must ensure that we are in a position to put it into play. I call on the Minister of State to tease out further the problem in respect of its constitutionality and the difficulty we have with it. The Minister of State referred to barring orders and I call on him to outline the position in more detail. It would be great if we could ratify the convention in the year when we have the EU Presidency. We should push the boat out as far as we can. It would send the right signal to the effect that we are serious about this.

This is a major problem. Up to 100,000 cases are not reported and there are still more cases where those involved do not come forward at all. They cannot be counted and they do not want to be counted for the sake of their families. I thank the Minister of State and welcome him. I believe we are going forward with a holistic, all-inclusive response to this major problem.

Senator John Gilroy: I welcome the Minister of State to the Chamber. Much of what I had wanted to say has already been said and I will not labour the Chamber with repetition. However, I welcome the opportunity to make some points. I welcome the comments of the Minister of State, especially those on forthcoming legislation on alcohol and public health. He identified that a major and significant contributing factor to domestic violence is alcohol, and anything we can do to ensure the responsible consumption of alcohol at a policy level should be welcomed.

I appreciate the Sinn Féin amendment to the motion we tabled. This is something that we can agree on in principle, there is no question about it. It goes a little further than the motion before the House from the Labour Party. The main contention is how to implement the Istanbul convention. I recognise, as did the Minister of State in his contribution, that there are some issues with the implementation. We must be careful to ensure that if we ratify it, there will be no obstacle to our implementing it in a meaningful way. I take the point made by the Minister of State that we need to be careful in our deliberations. I urge that we hasten our deliberations somewhat and ensure that we can have this done as quickly as possible.

The words of the Minister of State about the need for an open and wide-ranging discussion about domestic violence in a public forum are important. It is important that society stands up and denounces domestic violence in all its forms, often and wherever we find it. More important, as a society we need to challenge many of the attitudes because a culture of tolerance, down-playing or underestimating the effects of domestic violence is sometimes fostered. It is important to tackle this in a society which, up to recently, has been rather patriarchal in construction and which, I contend, remains so today. It is important to consider where our attitudes lead to. Sometimes, we see a casual carelessness around domestic violence. Often people who do not experience domestic violence do not fully understand or appreciate the devastating consequences. Silence and stigma are the partners of domestic violence. As a society we need to confront this openly at all times, discuss it and make clear that we will not tolerate it. That is important in tackling the issue as well.

As a former psychiatric nurse I have seen the consequences of domestic violence all too often. Long after the physical wounds or bruises have healed, the psychological trauma goes on. Sometimes this is the case even when the offending party to the domestic violence has been removed from the scene. The long-term effects of it and of the unequal power relationships associated with it have an ongoing effect.

I was taken by the comments of Senator MacSharry and my colleague, Senator Hayden.

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The burden with regard to formal supports falls largely on the victim of domestic violence with regard to providing proof to the authorities. I have encountered this in my constituency office frequently, as has the Minister of State and every colleague here. It seems that sometimes in the case of housing, the issue raised by Senator Hayden, when people try to remove themselves from a position and look for social authority housing support, there is a requirement for them to prove legal separation has occurred or that there are Garda reports available. The placing of such an onus on a victim who is already traumatised is unfair and something we must redress. The balance should always be in favour of the victim. That is the main point.

It is up to us as a society to challenge our attitudes towards domestic violence. We have come a long way in the past 30 or 40 years, there is no question of that, but I wonder whether we have really measured our progress and what measure of our progress has been taken. The casualness and carelessness that are sometimes portrayed in the language used in this debate might be a measure of the ongoing problem we have.

Senator Colm Burke: I thank the Minister of State for his contribution. Others have raised the issue of domestic violence and abuse. However, there is another type of abuse, namely, the abuse of the courts system. I have witnessed this as a practising solicitor. I am familiar with a case in which there are more than 25 court orders and the case is ongoing. This problem is particularly acute in cases where there are Supreme Court appeals and where there is a delay of up to four years. Some people are now using that process to delay a conclusion to the matter. This is something to which we need to give priority. I realise there is a proposal from Government, which is facing into the appointment of two extra Supreme Court judges. Priority should be given to dealing with the outstanding family law cases and, in particular, cases which have been waiting for some considerable time.

6 o'clock

We cannot interfere in the courts system, but there are people who are familiar with it, in particular lay litigants who have used it very effectively for delaying conclusions in family law matters. It is an abuse in its own way because it is emotionally, mentally, physically and financially draining. The family law system is trying to provide the maximum amount of protection for people, but there are people who have become all too familiar with it and are using it for their own self-interest. The courts need to examine this issue. It is something about which I am extremely concerned.

It needs to be dealt with in order that people cannot misuse the system while others suffer for long periods of time. Everyone else has made valid points. We always need to be conscious that where there is a need for change it is implemented. One such area is the appeal system.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I welcome the Minister of State to the House and commend my colleagues, in particular Senators Moloney and O'Keeffe, on proposing and seconding the motion. It is very important that we take time to review the way in which the Government is dealing with the very serious incidence of domestic violence.

We have taken time to commend what the Government has been doing. The Minister set out very clearly and comprehensively the measures it is adopting, but we also need, as he said, to contribute to the debate on a codifying piece of legislation on domestic violence which the Minister, Deputy Shatter, has promised, and on which he is working. There have been a number of reforms, which are welcome, but they have been made on a very piecemeal basis. It would be

of great benefit to everyone, in particular victims and survivors of abuse, if we could introduce a complete statute in which all protections and supports for survivors and victims are set out.

Senator Moloney's comment on introducing a new offence specifically to deal with domestic violence is one that should be given serious consideration. The label "domestic" is difficult and problematic, and there is a good deal of literature on that point. There is also the problem that few acts of so-called domestic violence are isolated events and, like offences of harassment or stalking, the criminal law, which is designed to deal with one-off offences, is not best suited to deal with it. It is something with which we have to grapple. It is a bigger question which can only be dealt with in codifying legislation, but as our motion suggests there are also many other aspects to dealing with domestic violence, alongside criminal legislation. We are very grateful to the Minister of State for addressing other aspects, such as funding for support services, training, monitoring and the need to tackle the perpetrators and prevent the abuse from occurring in the first place, and the need to focus Government policy on that, something which the Minister of State, Deputy Lynch, has spoken about extensively.

Senator Marie Moloney: We have had a fantastic debate. Everybody who spoke has a great grasp on what domestic violence means to families around the country. We all know domestic violence wreaks havoc in families on a daily basis in Ireland, but often slips off the political agenda. It is, without doubt, a silent crime and a taboo subject. Often people do not want to speak about it.

The Minister of State referred to funding which has been made available. I know he is not at the Cabinet table, but I urge him to speak to the Minister, Deputy Shatter, about the fact that funding is not adequate. The current level of funding should be retained. The matter will end up back in the lap of the Minister of State because health boards and local authorities are involved when people have nowhere to go. In Kildare, a new refuge centre is waiting to be opened but the doors remain closed. Everything is in place but there is no funding. Last year and earlier this year, 66 adults and 138 children were turned away because the doors are closed. It is an example of the funding shortage.

A study carried out on women who entered refuges found that the top priorities of women were staying safe, information support and housing, making decisions about their lives, healing emotionally and understanding the impact of domestic violence. Unfortunately, there are very few statistics on domestic violence, because it is not a crime on our Statute Book and, on many occasions, solicitors reach agreement on the steps of the courts. Often perpetrators will tell their victims that they know they love him or her, which is a key weakness. Victims do not want to take their partners to court and have their cases highlighted in newspapers, rather they want their partners to change. They did love them and lived with them, and want to return to that.

There is more than just one way of identifying domestic violence. For example, there is psychological abuse. Some people are told every day of the year that they are stupid, thick, worthless and that nobody would want them. One can imagine how that would affect one mentally and how it would destroy one's confidence. Broken bones and black eyes will eventually heal, but psychological abuse can last a lifetime. I know of one woman, who is in receipt of a small pension and has €20 a month to live on, but does not receive a penny from her husband. With that money she has to get her hair done and buy clothes and toiletries. She has lost many friends because she cannot go out for a cup of coffee or to an event. She is a prisoner in her own home.

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As I said, the system regarding domestic and sexual violence needs a good overhaul. It is not good enough that the perpetrator of a sexual assault can be given a slap on the back of the hand, told to pay a fine and go home. As a women, I, and I am sure, many of the women here, take such an attitude as an insult. No woman who goes into court and has to give graphic details of a sexual assault does so for money, rather she goes to court for justice and to ensure the perpetrator will never offend again. We have to deal with the issue of money now.

Traditionally, the State and religious organisations have let women and children down. I refer to symphysiotomy, the Magdalen laundries and child sexual abuse. We must not let this issue go on the back burner. We must step up to the plate and make changes in the judicial system now. I do not want others to apologise to people in 30 or 40 years' time because we did not act. Now is the time to act. We have seen what has happened over the years.

During my research on this motion I spoke with many organisations which assist women, and I thank them for their help and co-operation, in particular Safe Ireland, which is represented here today, and Women's Aid, which gave me a lot of help, advice and information. Safe Ireland has done a lot of work on this issue for many years and soon it will present its findings and proposals to overhaul the system to an Oireachtas committee. I ask that we all wait until that happens, and row in behind them if we agree with them to ensure the proposals are brought to fruition.

I thank all Senators who supported the motion and contributed to the debate. The issue has been dealt with sensitively and with the integrity it deserves. I trust the Minister of State will take all the sentiments expressed in the debate to the Minister.

Senator oirleach: Is the amendment being pressed?

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Yes.

Amendment put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 3; Níl, 33.	
Tá	Níl
Crown, John.	Bacik, Ivana.
Ó Clochartaigh, Trevor.	Bradford, Paul.
Reilly, Kathryn.	Brennan, Terry.
	Burke, Colm.
	Byrne, Thomas.
	Clune, Deirdre.
	Coghlan, Eamonn.
	Coghlan, Paul.
	Comiskey, Michael.
	Conway, Martin.
	Cummins, Maurice.
	D'Arcy, Jim.
	D'Arcy, Michael.
	Daly, Mark.
	Gilroy, John.

Seanad Éireann

	Hayden, Aideen.
	Healy Eames, Fidelma.
	Henry, Imelda.
	Higgins, Lorraine.
	Keane, Cáit.
	Landy, Denis.
	Leyden, Terry.
	Moloney, Marie.
	Moran, Mary.
	Mulcahy, Tony.
	Mullen, Rónán.
	Mullins, Michael.
	O'Donovan, Denis.
	O'Keeffe, Susan.
	O'Neill, Pat.
	O'Sullivan, Ned.
	van Turnhout, Jillian.
	Walsh, Jim.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Trevor Ó Clochartaigh and Kathryn Reilly; Níl, Senators Paul Coghlan and Aideen Hayden.

Amendment declared lost.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator O'Keeffe voted in the wrong seat and Senator Byrne voted in place of Senator Darragh O'Brien.

(Interruptions).

An Cathaoirleach: Neither vote changed the result.

Motion agreed to.

An Cathaoirleach: When is it proposed to sit again?

Senator Maurice Cummins: Ag leathuair tar éis a decih maidin amárach.

Adjournment Matters

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Architectural Heritage

An Cathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister for Justice and Equality to the House.

Senator Denis O'Donovan: I am somewhat honoured that the Minister, Deputy Shatter, has decided to come in to take this Adjournment motion. Castledonovan is a castle in a semi-derelict state but is of some historical importance to west Cork and Ireland. I was a member of the national monument committee of Cork County Council for a number of years and was actively proposing the refurbishment and renewal of Castledonovan for its historical importance. Eventually it was in private ownership and came into the hands of the State. My concern is that a neighbour who lives close to it said it is like a derelict building site. There has been scaffolding erected for ten or 11 years and little progress seems to have been made. My purpose in putting down this motion was to ascertain the facts.

What money has been spent on it to date? When is it likely that the refurbishment work will be concluded? When, if ever, will it be open to the public? What is the situation regarding expediting the work? Is there money there to do the work? I am looking for answers, and I will save some of my fire, if I have any left, for the response. I await the Minister's reply. I would like to have the facts of where we are regarding that project. It is under the remit of the Minister of State, Deputy Brian Hayes, under the OPW. I raise this out of general concern, not out of any criticism. I frequently pass the castle and it is of some historical importance. I am hoping the Minister can throw some light as to where we are regarding this project.

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I thank the Senator. I apologise on behalf of my colleague the Minister of State, Deputy Brian Hayes, who was unavailable. I was asked to stand in for him, so the Senator will appreciate that the information I will give him is the information that has been supplied by Deputy Brian Hayes's office to me.

I am advised that Castledonovan Castle, also sometimes known as O'Donovan's Castle, is a national monument in private ownership but in the care of the national monuments service of the OPW. It is located near Drimoleague, County Cork. It has an interesting history. Castledonovan is a castle, or tower house, of medium size and was the seat of the Clann Cathail of the O'Donovans during the 16th century. It was occupied for a time by the O'Donovans in the latter part of the 1500s but some histories report that the family had largely moved in the early years of the 17th century to another location closer to the sea. It was severely damaged in the 1640s, reputedly by the forces of Oliver Cromwell, who destroyed part of the structure apparently in retaliation for the family having sided with the Stuarts and participated in the rebellion of 1641. The building was abandoned after this and was not lived in subsequently.

Castledonovan is in private ownership and is therefore under the guardianship of the Commissioners of Public Works, who must make arrangements with the landowner to gain access to the building to carry out works. This arrangement is provided for legally in the various National Monuments Acts and this allows the Commissioners of Public Works to perform works to the building and undertake any maintenance necessary to keep it in good order. The building is wholly located on private lands, with no formal right of way currently for members of the public to access the property. However, the landowner is very committed to public access and has agreed with the national monuments service that he will facilitate public access to the building once all the work has been completed.

The national monuments service has been engaged in an ongoing scheme of works at Cas-

Castledonovan for several years. The project commenced in 2001 and will be fully concluded later this summer. The project has been technically very difficult and was hampered in the early stages, particularly by the condition of the building which was, at that time, fragile, structurally unstable and dangerous. The project was also affected by relatively poor weather over a number of summer seasons and the need, at times, to divert resources away to other conservation and maintenance projects ongoing in the region at the same time. While the length of time taken to bring the work to completion has been somewhat protracted, this needs to be viewed in the context of a project which was complex and, at times made more difficult by its particular circumstances.

The first phase of the work involved consolidating the structure to enable OPW's own workforce to work safely on the building and carry out necessary conservation of the structures. A comprehensive archaeological investigation, over three successive seasons, was also carried out at the site and this had to be done before any of the extensive conservation work necessary was undertaken. Elements of the original structure were unearthed during this excavation, some of which craftsmen were subsequently able to successfully use in the conservation project, re-incorporating these elements into the preserved structure.

The work at Castledonovan was carried out by OPW's own direct labour force, based at Mallow, County Cork. The project cost, including archaeology, scaffolding, OPW labour and all materials in the period 2001 to date is €1,672,841.83. The project is almost complete with only access stairs to the building to be provided and a small amount of fencing and landscaping yet to be done externally. As part of the landscaping, OPW will also, by agreement with the landowner, provide a small number of car parking spaces which will facilitate visitors wanting to see the castle. It is intended also to provide an interpretative panel outlining some of the history of the site and a local caretaker has been identified who will open and close the site and maintain a watch over it to ensure it is not damaged.

There are no plans to provide any guide facilities at Castledonovan, as at other OPW sites around the country, but Deputy Brian Hayes made considerable efforts last year through the communities initiative to invite interested local groups to join with the OPW to present sites such as this to visitors on a voluntary basis. I commend this initiative to the Senator and I suggest that if there are responsible and interested locals in the area who might be interested and who can organise themselves successfully, he should please refer them to the OPW. It is hoped that all works at Castledonovan will be completed by late June or early July this year and I hope that visitors will then be able to come and view the results of the long years of effort and skill by the craftsmen and women working within OPW.

Senator Denis O'Donovan: I thank the Minister. It is just two years since this Seanad came into being and he has been in the House many times, and this is the best piece of news he has brought me in those two years. I thank him for that. Perhaps it was unintentional that he was the bearer of the news but I am pleased that it is coming close to completion. I am also pleased that I was one of the few people politically, as a member of the national monument committee of Cork County Council back in the 1980s, to urge that this process take place. I will, as suggested by the Minister of State, Deputy Brian Hayes in that response, contact some local community groups which are doing a lot of work regarding walkways in the area. There is a very vibrant community in Drimoleague, which is down the road. The information is positive and I look forward to the opening. As a lot of money is being spent there, perhaps Deputy Shatter would convey to Deputy Brian Hayes that there should be an official opening. It is of major interest and work has been going on there for 12 years. Sometimes we are critical of the

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OPW but I am pleased that the fruits of the labour of those involved can be seen by the public. That is very important because there is some public concern. They are kept in the dark and this information will throw light on the project and I am glad it is coming close to its conclusion. I thank the Minister for the positive news.

Deputy Alan Shatter: I am extremely happy that I have made Senator O'Donovan happy. I am also relieved that as a consequence of what I was in a position to tell him, the Senator did not have to carry out his threat of starting to shoot at me. I can tell the Senator there are enough people shooting at me without adding him to the posse. I will certainly convey to Deputy Brian Hayes the Senator's request that he consider some official opening and his thanks for the work that has been undertaken and the possibility of his being able to identify individuals who may be interested in the project to the extent of showing visitors around. It is good to be able to come in and bring good news. It is the Minister of State, Deputy Brian Hayes's good news, but I am happy to convey it on his behalf to the House.

Senator Denis O'Donovan: Instead of shooting the messenger I will praise the messenger.

Direct Provision

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Cuirim céad fáilte roimh an Aire. I am delighted to see the Minister because an argument is often put forward that the Ministers are too busy to come to the House. We may not agree on policy issues all the time but he always makes time to come to the House, which I appreciate, especially for an Adjournment matter.

I have raised again the issue of direct provision. Direct provision is an appalling system set up as a privatised system under a Fianna Fáil regime and needs to be reformed. In opposition the Minister was very vocal in respect of the way the system has been set up. The system comprises approximately 37 centres, seven of which are State-owned, the rest are former hotels, guesthouses, hostels, convents, a holiday camp and a mobile home site which are under private ownership by private companies.

Organisations such as the Irish Refugee Council, AkiDwa, Doras Luimní, other refugee support groups and many others have drawn attention to the position in direct provision. I shall use a number of quotes from the Irish Refugee Council to the effect that it has collected evidence that conditions in many direct provision centres are substandard to the point of inhumane. A culture of fear and the constant threat of transfer mean residents are frequently afraid to complain and are discouraged from interacting with inspectors. The Irish Refugee Council believes that some of the private businesses which operate direct provision centres are failing to fulfil their obligation to provide safe, hospitable and clean accommodation as per the RIA house rules and procedures in order to maximise their own profits. It also tells us that whole families, including both parents and children of schoolgoing age are often allocated just one room. Contrary to housing regulations, teenage children commonly share with siblings of the opposite sex. Single residents and mothers with one or two children are often required to share a bedroom and bathroom facilities. Broken, dilapidated furniture in common areas and infestations of mice, cockroaches and insects have been reported. There are also incidents of intimidation and harassment by staff at some centres. Allegations have been made of abusive and foul language directed toward residents and frequent threats of transfer. In addition, black African residents report that they are treated differently from residents who are white or of Arab origin. I note that the RIA, which came under the auspices of the Minister in 2010, reported

that mobile homes in Athlone were damaged with hatchets after residents from neighbouring estates entered Lissywollen caravan site. While it was reported that the damaged property was repaired, the perimeter remained broken for some time.

Another case cited in the State sanctioned child poverty and exclusion report by the IRC stated that in early 2006 a sizeable section of a ceiling caved in on to the parents' bed and very close to their baby's cot. According to the resident they had reported the constant leak in the ceiling to the management on a number of occasions in the previous month. On many occasions I have reported my concern about the system. I am aware the Minister said he would consider reforming the system. I call on him to look at the role of profit-making companies in the system. As the system has to continue in some way perhaps the NGOs might be taken in as part of that regime. Will he consider issues such as opting into the EU reception conditions directive during the Irish Presidency?

Given that the system is privatised, which may be the nub of the problem, how many of the properties currently managed by NAMA are used as accommodation centres for asylum seekers under the direct provision system? Perhaps the Minister would itemise those properties as it is important that we get a full picture. Under the Ombudsman (Amendment) Bill 2010 and at the Joint Committee on Public Service Oversight and Petitions the Ombudsman asked that her remit be extended to cover the RIA and asylum centres, among other things, because she was aware there were a number of issues that people wanted to make known to her but she did not have a remit to look at them. There has been widespread condemnation of these centres and the way they are run.

While I appreciate that the Minister has made inroads into processing applications for asylum, I hope the process can be speeded up for the benefit of all the people in the system. I know people who have been in the system between seven and ten years. That is a terrible sentence to inflict on anybody who comes to Ireland seeking refuge. Certainly there is a need for reform in the system. I look forward to hearing the Minister's reply and appreciate the fact that he has taken the time to come to the House to take the matter.

Deputy Alan Shatter: As the Senator is aware we are developing a new piece of legislation to deal with residence, asylum and immigration issues. It had been my hope that it would have been published by now but it is part of the legislation waiting to be completed in the Attorney General's office. It is part of the Government's enormous legislative agenda and I have to take my turn with colleagues in the context of the different priorities. For my part this is priority legislation which will allow for a different approach in dealing with the issues of immigration and asylum.

The Senator strayed substantially beyond the question he put. One of the difficulties in this area is that there is not a single decision-making process. If an individual is refused asylum he or she can come back on another basis seeking to stay and there is a third basis on which one can seek to stay. If one is not happy with either of the legs of the process there is an appellate system, the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, and there is also the issue of judicial review. Any person in the system for five, six, seven, eight or nine years is there because he or she made application for judicial review of some decision made during the process to the High Court. As a lawyer I take the view that individuals, if they feel their rights have been violated, are entitled to make applications to the courts and to have their issues properly adjudicated on. In so far as there are individuals in the system for the length of time the Senator has stated, it is because they usually have had all their applications refused at different stages and have taken a court

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application. There is an enormous backlog of these cases in the courts and dealing with some aspects of these cases often gets further delayed when issues are referred to the European court for adjudication.

Clearly, one of the difficulties in this area is that we have a number of individuals who seek asylum in the State who have genuine grounds for seeking asylum under the relevant international provisions in place and under our own domestic law. We also have a substantial number of people who are economic migrants and who present with stories seeking asylum which turn out to lack validity. There are individuals who adopt false identities, who pretend to come from troubled parts of the world when they do not. There are individuals who will claim to be in war zones and when the matter is further investigated it turns out they were in London, Birmingham or elsewhere when they alleged they were in the Sudan or some other troubled part of the world. This is a real problem in dealing with the asylum system.

As one who was very committed to human rights issues and constitutional issues for many decades before becoming a Minister, the practical difficulty in this area is the number of economic migrants who present false cases for seeking asylum, who manufacture histories that are untrue and who, essentially, block the system and create difficulties for the real asylum seekers. So far as there are difficulties in this area, they are spawned substantially by that problem. The difficulties are added to when children are born to them in Ireland who are innocent of their parents' conduct; that is, parents who have no valid reason to seek asylum and who have concocted and fabricated stories and because of the length of time in the system the children establish roots here. We need a more efficient and better system for dealing with applicants. That can only be fully in place when the new legislation is enacted. I hope it will be published later this year and that it will be processed swiftly.

The direct provision system is not ideal but it is a system which facilitates the State providing a roof over the head of those seeking asylum or seeking other grounds to be allowed, on humanitarian grounds, to stay in the State. It allows the State to do it in a manner that facilitates resources being used economically in circumstances where the State is under financial difficulty. I do not claim that all direct provision facilities offered an ideal service in the past, but the system now includes a process of oversight of the properties in which direct provision is provided, as well as a complaints system. I wish to be very clear on this point. As Minister, I will not tolerate within the system any individual being discriminated against, racially abused or threatened in any shape or form. Within the context of the direct provision system, my officials have suggested to individuals who are providing facilities that they be upgraded where they are not proving adequate.

The Senator asked how many properties currently managed by NAMA are being used as accommodation centres for asylum seekers under the direct provision system. That question is based on a misapprehension as to the nature of the contractual relationship between the Reception and Integration Agency, the Department of Justice and Equality and those centres providing full-board accommodation to asylum seekers. The RIA is responsible for the accommodation of asylum seekers in accordance with the Government policy of direct provision and dispersal. As of today, there are 4,707 persons accommodated in 34 centres across the State. Details of these centres and the numbers being accommodated can be found on the RIA website. Seven of the centres are State owned, that is, while they are managed by private contractors under contract to the RIA, the land and buildings are owned by the State. The remaining 27 are commercially owned and operated.

The question of whether any commercially owned asylum accommodation centre is managed by NAMA is not relevant to the RIA. In fulfilling its general accommodation responsibilities, the latter does not own, lease or rent premises from commercial contractors. Rather, it contracts in a comprehensive range of services and facilities, including accommodation, house-keeping and so on, for a fixed sum over the period of a contract. It is a condition of contract with the RIA that the contractor has good title to the centre, but this does not specify either owning, renting or leasing the building concerned. The finance mechanism, whether loans or otherwise, used by the contractor for the provision of the service to the RIA is a matter solely for the contractor.

On the question of whether NAMA can divulge details of any property it may hold as security or where an enforcement action has been taken by the agency against a property, these issues are addressed on its website. My concern, as Minister, is that certain standards are maintained in direct provision centres such that the persons residing there are provided with accommodation that is reasonable and with food and other services as necessary. I wish we had a different system. In the current financial climate, however, there is no alternative. If, for example, the State were to close down direct provision, it would then have to fund the renting of apartments or homes by individual applicants, many of whom are economic migrants rather than genuine asylum seekers. I emphasise that some are genuine asylum seekers. It is not for me to pass judgment on any individual; we have a process for doing that. The State would inevitably incur enormous additional expense from a requirement to provide funding for renting properties and everything else that is necessary to maintain a home and feed a family.

I accept that the system is less than ideal, but it is one which, within the current resources of the State, offers a practical method of providing a roof over the head of individuals within the system. If we resolve our problems in this area such that all applicants finally have a determination and outcome, I would like then to have a system where all applications are determined within a maximum of six months. This will ensure that those residing unlawfully in the State are deported in a timely manner and those entitled to asylum or leave to remain for other reasons are facilitated in getting on with their lives in the shortest possible timeframe. It is not possible for that to happen, however, until we have a new legislative base. We must deal very carefully with these matters in order to ensure that people who are in the State unlawfully are subject to deportation. If that does not occur, it will be to the considerable disadvantage of those who seek to come here for economic reasons and who make proper use of our visa application process. The State would otherwise be overwhelmed by many thousands of economic migrants with no valid reason to come here and claiming to be asylum seekers.

Since taking office my Department has put in place systems which ensure that most cases are now processed extremely quickly and efficiently, in contrast to what happened in the past. However, the Senator is correct that a number of people have been awaiting a determination in their case for many years. Direct provision is the only way in which the State can afford to deal with these numbers at this time.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: The figures I have been given show that in 2012 the Department spent €63.5 million on direct provision. My question regarding NAMA arises from the fact that properties in NAMA are ostensibly State-owned properties. If any of the companies contracted by the RIA to provide accommodation to asylum seekers are under the aegis of NAMA, are we not simply giving moneys from one arm of the State to another? In those circumstances, surely a deal could be done which would save money for the State, which saving could then be used to fast-forward the asylum applications process and so on. Will the

Minister comment on this?

Deputy Alan Shatter: The Senator is incorrect in his conceptualisation of the position. I do not know whether any of the properties we are discussing are in NAMA, but the point is that it matters little either way. If one of the centres is in NAMA, all it means is that the company or individual who owns the property and is running the centre borrowed money from a bank at some time in the past which went towards the acquisition of the property and that the bank has subsequently, for whatever reason, transferred that loan to NAMA. The latter now holds the loan the property is secured against and the property owner is making the loan repayments to NAMA rather than the bank. If NAMA is recouping those loan repayments, it is doing so for the benefit of every taxpayer in the State in respect of the moneys that were put into the banking system to ensure those institutions remained solvent and functional.

In other words, the circularity to which the Senator referred is not in operation here. NAMA does not own the properties under its remit; it merely has each property secured against the loan the agency is seeking to have repaid. If any of the direct provision centres are under the remit of NAMA - as I said, I do not know whether this is the case - then in circumstances where the company that owns the property stopped repaying the loan, NAMA would then seek to repossess and thereafter possibly sell it. Any such property would cease to be a direct provision centre and one could not expect NAMA simply to present it to my Department. After all, the people of this country are paying a very high price to keep our banks financially viable. If money can be recouped that will eventually reduce the pressures taxpayers are facing, it is in everybody's interest that NAMA should seek to recoup it.

7 o'clock

The manner in which the Senator conceptualises is just unfortunately incorrect. If he was correct, I might celebrate because it might mean we could do this at a lower cost but, unfortunately, he is not.

Local and Community Development Programme Project Funding

Senator Lorraine Higgins: I welcome the Minister to the House. I wish to raise the need for him to clarify the employment position of Leader and community funded scheme employees. I have concerns that the proposed realignment process his Department is undertaking as part of his local government reform agenda will lead to direct job losses without this group and the loss of economic opportunity in communities throughout Ireland. I would like to outline the importance of these groups to towns such as my own, Athenry, County Galway, where more than 30 people are employed at the Mellows Campus, Galway Rural Development Company Limited, GRD, through the Leader programme and Tús, rural social scheme and other schemes. Athenry has fallen victim to the recession and up to 30 commercial units are vacant. We cannot endure further losses of economic activity in the town. Thirty fewer people frequenting the place could have an adverse effect on local businesses and place them in jeopardy.

However, another worrying matter has been brought to my attention. I understand when the alignment working group sought expressions of interest, it forgot or did not include local action groups in my area as part of this process. Only the county council was requested to participate in the process. This is unfair and it is important that these groups get an opportunity to address some submissions by other parties which may implicate or affect them. The fairest way would

be for the country council, GRD and other community funded schemes in County Galway to submit a combined expression of interest. I ask the Minister respectfully to consider this.

I would appreciate it if he would clarify what will happen to the employees in the eventuality of a consolidation of services within the county council structure.

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I thank Senator Higgins for raising this important issue and for the opportunity to clarify many issues in the public domain in various communities. Groups have had many meetings in recent months to discuss this issue. Last October, the Government approved Putting People First - Action Programme for Effective Local Government, which included recommendations by an expert alignment steering group for enhancing alignment between local government and local development. The steering group made a number of recommendations aimed at improving co-ordination across the range of local publicly funded programmes, achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of those programmes and, most important, at improving the delivery of services to the citizen and communities.

Principal among these is a recommendation to establish socio-economic committees within each local authority area, with responsibility for strategic oversight and planning for a broad range of local and community development interventions at local level. When established, committee will bring together all relevant local actors in strategic collaboration. They will focus on intended outcomes including, developing a more integrated approach to publicly funded programmes, improved matching of resources to priorities, improved systems for impact measurement and assessment, more sustainable programme administration costs and the use of shared services where appropriate.

Socio-economic committees will be responsible for a broader range of publicly funded programmes and structures than those contracted to local delivery bodies, including local development companies. These companies will continue to have an important role in implementing the programmes for which they are contracted by my Department and others and they will be key partners on the committees. The committees are being advanced in ten pilot areas as agreed by the alignment working group, which includes the Irish Local Development Network that represents local development companies. Correspondence issued to all local authorities, both the ten pilot areas and the other remaining areas, on 18 April. The ten areas for which pilot socio-economic committees are being considered are Dublin City Council, Dún-Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, South Dublin County Council, Leitrim County Council, Roscommon County Council, Offaly County Council, Mayo County Council, Galway County Council, Limerick County Council and Cork County Council.

Alignment, in itself, is not intended to impact on the funding of local development companies. Programme and administration funding will continue to be provided and any suggestion that alignment will result in either the closure of local development companies or in significant job losses is not an accurate interpretation. The employment levels in local development companies such as the local community development programme, rural social scheme and Tús will depend on Exchequer funding, not EU funding. Of greater concern to the sustainability of local development companies is the reduction in programme funding that has been happening, and is likely to continue, in respect of the two main programmes local development companies deliver for my Department. There have been funding reductions on the local and community development programme and it is likely that Leader funding will be much reduced for the 2014 to 2020 programme period compared to the past seven years. These funding realities are likely

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to have a more notable impact on local development companies and employment. This adds to the compelling case for reform and for a more streamlined system, which is fit for purpose, eliminates unnecessary duplication and achieves better value for money. I believe the significant reform we are undertaking will place our local development system on a more sustainable footing, retain the expertise and experience of local development companies going forward and ensure the continuing delivery of quality services into our communities.

I ask partnership companies to desist from creating confusion about job losses at meetings and to tell people the true and accurate position. Approximately 1,900 people are employed under all these programmes throughout the State and the only programme for which funding is uncertain is the rural development programme, which employs approximately 250 people. This is due to the funding reduction we face arising from recent decisions by the EU regarding the multi-annual financial framework and the Common Agricultural Policy. There is some uncertainty about how many of the 250 people will be employed in the future based on what will be agreed with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the union in the months ahead regarding the rural development programme. However, employment under the remaining programmes is dependent on Exchequer funding and most of that employment is likely to continue.

Senator Lorraine Higgins: I thank the Minister for his detailed response and for clarifying the position on the alignment working group, the expressions of interest which have been sought by it and funding issues. I stress that the security of jobs in Athenry and throughout the country is of paramount importance to the people and the towns and local communities that benefit from the economic activity generated by them. I also welcome the Minister's statement that alignment will not have an impact on funding, although there may be other issues relating to Exchequer funding, as well as his clarification that the suggestion that the closure of the local development companies will result in significant job losses is not accurate.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I am glad to have the opportunity to clarify that the position regarding the 30 people in Athenry and in every other Leader partnership company around the country, including in County Mayo, in which I am sure the Cathaoirleach will have an interest-----

An Cathaoirleach: I am taking a keen interest in this.

Deputy Phil Hogan: There have been many public meetings in recent times and a great deal of confusion has been generated. I am sure the Cathaoirleach will be in a good position to clarify these issues and give people the true position regarding the fact that the funding for the rural development programme, through which a small number of the total of 1,900 people are employed, is under the greatest pressure.

Of the 30 people employed in Athenry, I suspect approximately five are involved in the rural development programme with the remaining 25 involved in the other programmes. The vast majority of the people employed in Athenry will continue to be employed but, equally, we have to look at the administrative funding and how we can eliminate the duplication of administrative structures to ensure the funding goes to the projects and the front-line services, which is what the funding is all about.

Senator Deirdre Clune: A national dementia strategy has been promised in the programme for Government and I wish to ascertain its status. May is European month of the brain, which aims to promote understanding of the brain and the challenges we all face in dealing with complex diseases affecting it. Tomorrow is Alzheimer's Tea Day, which will highlight brain disease as well as the need to support families and carers of those who are affected. There are 42,000 persons living with dementia in Ireland. It is difficult for all those involved. There is the stress of dealing with a family member or loved one, and considerable pressure on them to care for him or her. In the absence of a dementia strategy, that can become more difficult.

Last week the CSO produced figures that show the number of those over 65 is due to rise dramatically, from 532,000 to over 850,000 by 2026 and close to 1.4 million by 2046. I am not saying they all will have dementia but it is a disease that is linked with age. There is a growing elderly population. The instance of dementia is set to increase to between 140,000 and 145,000 by 2041, and it needs to be addressed. We need to ensure that there will be early detection of the disease so that support can be given and to restrict the development of the disease, but we also need to ensure that there is a strategy whereby if a family presents in such a situation, they know where they are going and the services that can be provided, and we can enhance community support services which are vital in this area. In light of the day that is in it tomorrow and the month that it is, it is time there would be a statement on the dementia strategy as it is long awaited by all involved in this area.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I thank Senator Deirdre Clune for raising this issue and giving the Minister for Health, for whom I am deputising this evening, an opportunity to outline progress to date towards developing a dementia strategy. I am aware of the Senator's personal interest in this subject.

With increases in the older population in the future, and particularly among the oldest, the prevalence of dementia will increase. Dementia is one of the major causes of disability in old age and in economic terms, the cost of dementia in Ireland is estimated to be €1.69 billion per annum. However, the economic cost is only a small part of the story. The personal cost and the medical, psychological and emotional impact is overwhelming.

The Government has given a commitment to develop a national dementia strategy by the end of this year to increase awareness of dementia, ensure early diagnosis and intervention, and develop enhanced community-based services. It is important that we are consistent in our thinking on all of the issues which affect those with dementia.

Last year, the Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy Kathleen Lynch, launched a national carers' strategy in recognition of the invaluable role and contribution of carers in Ireland. It places carers firmly on the national agenda and sets the strategic direction for future policies, services and supports provided for carers.

The Minister for Health recently published "Healthy Ireland", the national health and well-being framework, and the Minister of State, Deputy Kathleen Lynch, published the National Positive Ageing Strategy on 24 April. These plans take a whole-of-Government approach to promoting health and well-being and recognise that quality of life is affected by a range of interconnected social, economic and environmental factors. The national dementia strategy will build on these initiatives and will ensure that recognition is given that for those with dementia, well-being is also affected by a range of interconnected factors that are broader than those that are only health-related.

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Last year saw the launch of “Creating Excellence in Dementia Care: A Research Review for Ireland’s National Dementia Strategy”, which gathered the evidence to inform the development of the strategy and which made a number of recommendations about key areas which should be focused on. The Department of Health recently completed a public consultation process to ensure that everybody with an interest had an opportunity to inform the development of the strategy. The key message which emerged from the consultation was the need to place the person with dementia, irrespective of settings, at the centre of service planning and decision-making processes about all aspects of his or her life. A recurring theme throughout the submissions highlighted the need for increased awareness and enhanced training for health professionals in all settings.

The Department of Health is about to set up a working group which will include a broad range of expertise and knowledge to help develop the strategy. It is the Minister’s intention to finalise the strategy by the end of this year as promised. The Minister of State, Deputy Kathleen Lynch, is conscious of the constraints imposed by the budgetary situation but hopes that this strategy will be visionary and creative and lead to changes in work practices and processes and alignment of resources to deliver better results and promote quality of life and quality of care for those with dementia and for their families, their carers, and their friends and community.

Senator Deirdre Clune: I thank the Minister for his contribution. I am glad to hear that the strategy is still on track for development and delivery in 2013.

The Seanad adjourned at 7.15 p.m. until 10.30 p.m. on Thursday, 9 May 2013.