



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

**SEANAD ÉIREANN**

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

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## SEANAD ÉIREANN

*Déardaoin, 23 Meitheamh 2016*

*Thursday, 23 June 2016*

Chuaigh an Leas-Chathaoirleach i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

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*Machnamh agus Paidir.  
Reflection and Prayer.*

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### **Business of Seanad**

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** I have received notice from Senator Colm Burke that, on the motion for the Commencement of the House today, he proposes to raise the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Health to implement a workforce plan for the entire health service, including the public, private and voluntary sectors, to provide for the substantial growth in the need for gerontological care.

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

An gá atá ann go dtabharfaidh an tAire Sláinte léargas ar cén straitéis atá á cur ar bun ag an Rialtas chun dul i ngleic leis na liostaí feithimh in Ospidéal na hOllscoile, Gaillimh.

I have also received notice from Senator Robbie Gallagher of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to increase funding for regional and local roads in County Monaghan and throughout rural Ireland to a level commensurate with maintaining roads at an acceptable level.

I have also received notice from Senator Paul Coghlan of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to outline her intentions and plans for Killarney House; when it will open to the public; what it will interpret, contain and display; whether it will commemorate the previous owners, namely, the Browne Family, Earls of Kenmare, who were so involved in the development of Killarney town through the ages, and the McShain family; and if it will function as the main visitor centre for Killarney National Park.

I have also received notice from Senator Paul Gavan of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to address the question of whether he approved the landing or transit through Irish air space of certain US military

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aircraft and, if so, why, given that the presence of these aircraft belonging to a belligerent state on or over Irish territory is a clear breach of Ireland's international law obligations as a neutral state.

I have also received notice from Senator Máire Devine of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Health to respond to the grave concerns about the proposed 50% cut in the number of night nursing staff at Cloverhill Prison.

I have also received notice from Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Health to urgently provide the €350,000 needed to reopen the Tír na nÓg respite care centre in Carlow that was closed in December 2015.

I have also received notice from Senator Kevin Humphreys of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to inform the Seanad of the progress made in the delivery of 500 modular housing units to alleviate the housing crisis.

I have also received notice from Senator Kieran O'Donnell of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Education and Skills to outline his plans to make physical education part of the primary school curriculum to combat child obesity.

I regard the matters raised by the Senators as suitable for discussion. I have selected the matters raised by Senators Colm Burke, Trevor Ó Clochartaigh, Robbie Gallagher and Paul Coghlan and they will be taken now. Senators Paul Gavan, Máire Devine, Jennifer Murnane O'Connor, Kevin Humphreys and Kieran O'Donnell may give notice on another day of the matters they wish to raise.

## **Commencement Matters**

### **Care of the Elderly**

**Senator Colm Burke:** I welcome the Minister of State and thank her for taking this matter which concerns long-term planning. The Minister has set out clearly the need for a ten-year strategy for palliative care. However, we need to consider the HSE's 2015 annual report and the emphasis placed in it on the need for urgency in dealing with demographic influences. Let us consider the figures. In this regard, the Minister of State will have seen the figures quoted previously.

The number of people aged 65 years and over is 600,000, but by 2031 the corresponding figure will be over 1 million, which will represent growth of 400,000 within a short timeframe. The good and interesting news is that the number in the over 85 year age group is also increasing. My understanding is the figure has increased by approximately 20% in the past six years

alone. The HSE report cites the fact that the number in the over 85 year age group is growing by approximately 4.5% per annum. I am looking for some joined-up thinking among those involved in the care of the elderly, including in the private and the public sectors. The fair deal scheme is functioning well in the sense that there are now over 23,000 people in private nursing homes under the scheme. The question is how we plan for what will happen in the long term and whether we can have the same ratio in the coming 15 years. How can we provide for care in nursing homes without the necessity of people having to be admitted to hospital? An issue arises when elderly persons are referred to hospital from nursing homes. Is the emergency department the appropriate route for them?

The matter I am raising relates to long-term planning and the need to put something comprehensive in place to deal with the growing number for whom we will have to provide in the coming ten, 12 and 15 years. That is the context in which I am raising the matter with the Minister of State.

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I thank the Senator for raising this Commencement matter.

Ireland's population is ageing rapidly, with advances in health care leading to a dramatic rise in the older population. As the Senator mentioned, in the next 20 years the number of people over 65 years will double and the number of people in their 80s will treble. While that is obviously very positive, it brings its challenges. These demographic changes will have significant social and economic implications. Demand for community services is rising as more people are supported at home rather than in hospitals or nursing homes.

The challenges arising from population ageing can be met if we plan effectively and necessary adjustments are made over time to services. We need to ensure levels of service are sufficient to meet the growing needs, that services are co-ordinated and integrated effectively and that the preferences of older people are at the heart of this process.

Significant additional resources were provided for older persons services in 2015. Two weeks ago we provided €40 million in additional funding to support home care services and develop short stay and transitional care beds. There will, however, always be a cohort of older people who will require a quality long-term residential care option. It must continue to be available to anyone who needs it. Therefore, we will ensure the nursing homes support scheme is funded to a level where successful applicants will not have to wait more than four weeks for funding.

Most older people want to stay in their own homes for as long as they can. It is widely accepted, not just within the Department of Health and the HSE but also among advocacy groups, that people live happier, longer and healthier lives when they live in and contribute to their communities. Home care services are a key element of how we can support them to do this.

A Programme for a Partnership Government is committed to supporting, on a multiannual basis, the development of home care services. We are now supporting more people at home with more complex needs than would have been possible in the past. The more of this we can achieve, the more and better the options we can offer to older people.

The integrated care programme for older people which is being established and implemented across four pilot sites, inclusive of community health care organisations and hospital groups, will bring a focus to the clinical requirements of the small but ever increasing number of older

people with complex care needs who are at risk of admission to hospital emergency departments in an unscheduled manner. This was an issue raised by the Senator. The programme will see the development of access to specialist teams such as consultant geriatrician-led multidisciplinary teams and bring a case management approach to supporting identified older people living in their own community through bespoke care plans and where resources such as home care, day care and respite care services can be interlinked appropriately to meet their needs in order that each organisation will know what each person's care plan is and can deal with it appropriately.

The Department of Health is committed to developing a national integrated strategic framework for health workforce planning in collaboration with other Departments and agencies. A cross-sectoral steering group has been established to develop this workforce planning framework for health services that will support the recruitment and retention of the right mix of staff across the health system. It is envisaged that a plan will be submitted by the end of the year setting out how we can ensure an adequate supply of appropriately trained health professionals to provide high-quality services that are delivered safely and cost-effectively. In that regard, additional funding is required on an annual basis. We also need a change in how we provide services. That shift is happening, but obviously we need to ensure it will happen as quickly as possible.

**Senator Colm Burke:** I have a question on home care services. One of the big problems in rural areas is finding suitably qualified staff to look after elderly people. Can we develop a new initiative in that regard? It is now a fundamental issue. I am dealing with a case where someone living in a rural area is on dialysis three days a week. The person concerned needs the additional support which in a rural area can be quite difficult to receive. I ask the Minister of State to consider a new initiative to encourage people living in rural areas who might not be in the workforce to provide this backup support. Could something like this be done?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** The cross-sectoral steering group that has been established has been given a remit to look at this issue. I will certainly ensure there will be something specific for elderly people and those living in rural areas. In recent years it has been a mixture of the lack of funding and also not being at the relevant stage. I will bring that matter to attention of the steering group.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

**Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh:** Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire Stáit. Ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas a dhéanamh léi i dtosach as ucht a ceapacháin. Guím gach rath uirthi. I congratulate the Minister of State on her appointment and wish her all the best.

A number of years ago we were told with great fanfare that the west was getting a new hospital group called Saolta that would go a long way towards solving the crisis in health services in the west. Unfortunately, the practice has not proved to be as successful as planned. The latest figures and statistics from the National Treatment Purchase Fund are stark for University Hospital Galway, in particular. We have had much talk of leagues and people winning games etc., but, unfortunately, University Hospital Galway is top of the league again for outpatient and inpatient waiting lists for all the wrong reasons. According to the latest figures, University Hospital Galway is top of the list nationally, with 31,417 waiting on its outpatient waiting list. When the figures are parsed more closely, we can see that 4,744 on the waiting lists have

been waiting for more than 12 months. The particular pressure points seem to be in cardiology, dermatology, general medicine, general surgery, gynaecology, neurology, ophthalmology, orthopaedics and ENT. Particularly worrying are the figures in orthopaedics where 4,248 are waiting on the outpatient waiting list.

Unfortunately, the picture gets worse when one considers inpatient day cases by hospital. Not only is University Hospital Galway “Top of the Pops” again, but its figure is actually almost double that for its closest rival. It has 11,099 on its waiting list. Its closest rival is Beaumont Hospital which has 6,065 on its waiting list. Again, when the figures are parsed, we can see that 2,907 have been waiting for more than 12 months. Therefore, almost one in four has been waiting for more than a year for the treatment he or she needs.

Representatives of the Saolta hospital management group recently made a presentation to Oireachtas Members and members of the regional health forum in which they finally said publicly that they believed there was a massive issue in the hospital in Galway. We have been saying this for years. They said it was clear that the hospital could not deal with the numbers passing through it and that that was part of the reason for the consistently high numbers on waiting lists.

The physical building is not the only problem. There are huge issues with staffing, particularly a lack of nurses. The lack of theatre nurses has been highlighted as an issue, as has the number of specialists in various areas. In the past five years I heard that this issue would be addressed and that there would be recruitment processes, etc. However, the lists are getting ever longer and people are suffering for longer, with no apparent solution. That is why this is a crucial question for the people of Galway.

As Senator John O’Mahony will know, part of the reason waiting lists are so long is that the Saolta hospital group now covers the hospitals from County Donegal to County Galway, including those in counties Mayo and Roscommon. People living in all of these regions are affected by the long waiting lists in Galway. It is totally unacceptable and the issue needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. I look forward to the Minister of State’s response to see what plan and strategy the Department has to ensure it is addressed as a matter of urgency.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** Tá brón orm nach bhfuil mórán Gaeilge agam; therefore, I will respond in English.

I thank the Senator for giving me the opportunity to address the House on this issue. I again apologise for the mix-up yesterday. I am taking this debate on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Health, Deputy Simon Harris, who sends his apologies; he is elsewhere on Government business.

Tackling waiting lists has been a challenge for hospitals this year to date, particularly owing to increased demand for emergency care, which increased by 5.6% on the figure for last year. Waiting lists for specialties such as rheumatology, orthopaedics, ophthalmology, urology, plastics and ENT are challenging nationally. However, the 2016 HSE service plan undertakes to maintain 2015 levels of service in the case of scheduled care.

The HSE oversees and supports hospital groups in meeting waiting list targets and has established a scheduled care governance group to co-ordinate key actions to reduce waiting times. University Hospital Galway, UHG, as part of the Saolta University Health Care Group, continues to monitor and act on outpatient, inpatient and day-case targets in line with the HSE

national service plan. The hospital provides tertiary level services and accepts referrals from a large catchment area, contributing to waiting list length.

The HSE has advised that specific measures have been taken to reduce the length of current waiting lists. Additional outpatient clinics are taking place within University Hospital Galway, while some activity is being transferred to Mayo, Roscommon and Portlincera University Hospitals. University Hospital Galway is developing the elements required to support specialties with the longest waiting times regarding inpatient beds, high-end equipment, access to theatre and staffing, all of which are required to support greater elective surgery throughput. Initiative clinics are running in some specialties to reduce particularly challenging waiting lists, some led by allied health professionals such as physiotherapists and nurses.

The HSE has further advised that IT solutions are being deployed to validate current waiting lists and streamline outpatient appointment scheduling, as well as minimising do-not-attend cases. The shortage of radiographers, causing recent issues with the MRI and DXA scanning facilities, is being addressed by ongoing recruitment. Extended hours of operation are being implemented for the MRI facility. University Hospital Galway has recently protected the surgical day ward for elective activity as demand for emergency care decreases. Construction work is ongoing on a new 75-bed ward block, as well as a new UHG acute mental health department.

The Minister is confident the Saolta group, in conjunction with the HSE, is working to address waiting lists at University Hospital Galway in the best interests of patients. A Programme for a Partnership Government emphasises the need for a sustained commitment to improving waiting times for patients, with a particular focus on those waiting the longest. It commits to the provision of €15 million in funding for the National Treatment Purchase Fund in 2017 for an initiative targeted at those waiting the longest as part of a continued investment of €50 million per year to reduce waiting lists. The Department of Health is engaging with the National Treatment Purchase Fund, while the HSE is planning a dedicated 2016 waiting list initiative focused on endoscopy. It has also commenced engagement with the National Treatment Purchase Fund and the HSE to deliver on the waiting list commitments in A Programme for a Partnership Government. The fact that a high number are waiting over 12 months needs to be a priority for the Minister. I will bring the matter to his attention. We have been successful in many areas, but we still have much work to do.

**Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh:** I thank the Minister of State for her response. I am glad that she acknowledged that waiting lists in Galway were higher than anywhere else. The short-term needs must be addressed and I hope the National Treatment Purchase Fund can examine prioritising dealing with the issues in Galway. The elephant in the room, however, is the need for a new hospital, with the provision of the necessary resources, in Galway. I have previously called on the Minister for Health to put together a working group to look at the issue of building a new hospital in Galway on a greenfield site, with the provision of the requisite staffing and resources, for which Dr. Pat Nash, clinical director of the Saolta hospital group, has called. Anyone in Galway and across the region can see that this is imperative if the hospital group is to continue servicing the region. Will the Minister of State ask the Minister to consider setting up a working group immediately to look at the need for a new hospital in Galway on a greenfield site?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** I will do so. I will also ask the Minister if the €15 million fund can be used specifically to deal with the issues in Galway.

*Seanad Éireann*  
**Road Network**

**Senator Robbie Gallagher:** I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Patrick O'Donovan, to the Chamber and congratulate him on his appointment.

I have raised the issue of the condition of the rural roads infrastructure, particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan. Many Members are well qualified to speak about this issue, as they travelled throughout the country in seeking to be elected to this House. We may have reached a few dead-ends, but that was from a purely political point of view.

County Monaghan is predominantly rural, with less than 30% of the population living in urban areas, compared to the national average of 62%. It has a strong agrifood manufacturing and engineering base, with many employers living in local areas along small boreens. It has no real public transport infrastructure and a poor national bus service. It has the highest density of local roads per square kilometre outside Dublin. It is dependent on its roads infrastructure, in particular regional and local roads, to provide mobility and access to employment opportunities. It has the highest agricultural exports value per hectare outside Dublin, mainly poultry, with 52% of the country's entire flock located in the county. It is also the largest producer and exporter of mushrooms. Both sectors depend on commercial vehicles being able to access local roads to get produce to the marketplace. Approximately 2,500 people are employed in the agriculture sector in County Monaghan, the highest number in any Border county.

This year the roads funding allocation for Cavan-Monaghan came to €13 million. While it seems to be a lot of money, it represents a decrease of 40% on the amount allocated in 2011. An extensive survey conducted by Monaghan County Council indicated that 60% of regional and local roads were in need of immediate attention. When one thinks of the good work that has been done and the investment that has been made in local roads infrastructure across the country, it is sad that it is now crumbling under our feet. It is an acute issue in an area such as Monaghan from an employment perspective. Will the Minister of State increase the funding available?

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** This is my first visit to Seanad Éireann.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** The Minister of State is welcome.

**Deputy Patrick O'Donovan:** I attempted to get in here on one occasion, but I was beaten by a quarter of one vote.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** We are delighted to have the Minister of State here and hope we will have him here again.

**Deputy Patrick O'Donovan:** I congratulate the Leas-Chathaoirleach and all Senators on their election. I look forward to working with Members on the various panels and in the university seats.

As the line Minister of State with responsibility for tourism and sport, I congratulate the Republic of Ireland soccer team on its fantastic result last night. I am sure all Senators, including the Leas-Chathaoirleach, will agree that it was a fantastic result for the country. I see my predecessor, the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Ring, in the Visitors Gallery. They are all asking for him in the field of sport, but they are in safe hands.



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I thank the Senator for raising this matter which I am taking on behalf of the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Shane Ross, who is out of the country. Much of what the Senator said resonates with me as I come from west Limerick which is also predominantly rural. While there is a large urban centre in Limerick city, the majority of the constituency I represent mirrors the Senator's. Accordingly, I am acutely aware of the issue raised by him.

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in Monaghan and other counties are the statutory responsibility of the local authority, in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on these roads are funded from the council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded are also matters for the local authority.

Ireland has just under 100,000 km of road in its network and the maintenance and improvement of roads place a substantial financial burden on local authorities and the Exchequer. Owing to the national financial position, for several years there have been large reductions in Exchequer funding available for roads expenditure. For this reason, the focus has been on maintenance and renewal rather than major new improvement schemes.

In January this year my predecessor, the then Minister of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, announced the 2016 regional and local road allocations, of which Monaghan County Council was allocated €7.16 million.

*11 o'clock*

In February and May this year, as part of the tranche 1 and 2 funding for local authorities to remedy damage caused by severe weather, Monaghan County Council received additional funding, bringing the total for regional and local roads in the county in 2016 to €12.3 million. All available funding for 2016 has now been allocated. An important change was made last year arising from the introduction of the local property tax, LPT, and the Government commitment that local authorities would retain 80% of revenues from 2015. Under this new arrangement, the four Dublin councils became fully self-funding in respect of the main regional and local road maintenance and rehabilitation programmes.

In addition, the Department has emphasised to the councils that will continue to receive Exchequer and local road grants that the commitment of local authorities to contribute significantly from their own resources towards the cost of improving and maintaining the regional and local roads network is essential and that full consideration needs to be given to utilising local property tax revenue to boost their own resources. For the next number of years the financial realities are that the budgets proposed by my Department indicate that capital funding will continue to be very tight, limiting the scope for progressing additional new projects over and above the public private partnerships, PPP, programme that is already in place and the projects prioritised in the capital plan. It is important, however, to note that the seven-year transport capital plan does provide for the gradual build-up of capital funding for the road network from the current relatively low base towards levels needed to support maintenance and aid and improve works.

The capital plan published in September 2015 outlined proposed transport investment priorities to 2022. The transport element of the plan was framed by conclusions reached in the Department's strategic investment framework for land transport. The report highlighted the importance of the maintenance and renewal of transport infrastructure, together with tar-

geted investments to address particular bottlenecks and critical safety issues. The capital plan provides €6 billion for investment in the road network in the period to 2022, with €4.4 billion earmarked for the maintenance and strengthening of the existing extensive network throughout the country and €1.6 billion for new projects.

I think we are all conscious that the recovery of the economy is generating spending pressures across the Government system, including capital investment needs. As part of A Programme for a Partnership Government, there is increased emphasis on the need for spending on public services, but the Government still has to operate within EU fiscal rules and this does constrain options. There will be a mid-term review of the capital plan which will provide an opportunity to assess progress and consider the scope for increased levels of investment, depending on economic growth. On that point, I am very conscious of where I come from and our dependence on the road network. As the Senator said, we do not have a rail line from my county either. In the context of the review, I am very conscious of the condition of tertiary, local and all other roads on which we are so dependent in rural areas.

**Senator Robbie Gallagher:** I thank the Minister of State for his response. It is heartening to know that his neck of the woods is similar to ours and that he can appreciate and relate to the point we are making. I appeal to him, however, to raise in his discussions with the Minister, Deputy Shane Ross, the fact that the network is crumbling under our feet or tyres and that we are storing up more problems for ourselves down the road if we do not address this critical issue as a matter of urgency. Additional funding is needed. Otherwise we will have a bigger problem in trying to restore roads to an acceptable level in the future.

**Deputy Patrick O'Donovan:** I do not disagree with the Senator. I have met officials from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in the past few weeks as part of my introduction to my current role. As a former member of Monaghan County Council, the Senator will probably agree with me that a major issue is that local authorities, even when they did have money, did not carry out adequate drainage works in the past few years. One can find roads all over the country where good money was thrown after bad. As the Senator said, roads are crumbling because water literally has nowhere to go. One of the issues I was very keen to deal with as a councillor and that I now wish to deal with, having been appointed as a Minister of State in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, is that local authorities must also take responsibility for dealing with many of the problems, especially on regional and local roads, which are due to the fact that there is no drainage. Drains have not been maintained since the famous man with a shovel was around. Until we get back to a situation where water will be allowed to drain off tertiary, secondary and regional roads, we will continue to have this problem. I would much prefer to see a proper drainage network to take water off roads rather than, as the Senator said, watch the road network crumble. I will certainly take the points he has made on board and relay them to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. Much of what he said I would say myself and I do not disagree with any of it.

## **Architectural Heritage**

**Senator Paul Coughlan:** I am delighted to see the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Ring, in this position. I very much welcome his appointment and hope to see him often in Killarney. I think he is nearly as familiar as I am with the particular property mentioned in this Commencement matter. As he knows, Killarney House is a magnificent place which has been beautifully

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restored and has had huge money invested in it by the State and his Department. Perhaps one other Department provided a little help. I think the Minister of State is taking over responsibility for the National Parks and Wildlife Service, something about which I am delighted. A wonderful job has been done in the gardens of Killarney House which are now open to the public at weekends and which, I think, will be open on a full-time basis shortly - next month, in fact.

I look forward to hearing the Minister of State outline when Killarney House will open to the public. I expect it to happen before the year is out and I am sure it will contain suitable commemorative rooms to the previous owners, John McShain, the man who built Washington, and the Browne family, Earls of Kenmare, who were significantly involved in the development of Killarney town since the 1600s or so. Please God, the house will have the capacity to become the top tourist attraction in the south west, given that it is situated within the town and the national park. As the Minister of State will outline, I am sure it will become the main visitor centre for Killarney National Park. Being immediately adjacent to the town centre, it is but a short walk for visitors staying at any of the hotels and locals alike, through the golden gates, as they are known. I look forward to the Minister of State's comments on the governance, management and operation of Killarney House.

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Michael Ring) :** As this is the first occasion on which I have been present in the Seanad since the new Members were elected, I congratulate everybody who was elected. I congratulate Senator Paul Coghlan on being appointed Leas-Chathaoirleach; it is a well deserved honour as he has served this House well and is one of the great survivors, not alone in this House but also the country, following the recent campaign to ensure the retention of the Seanad. I also compliment the Senator who is in the Chair on her appointment as the new Chief Whip and wish her well in the role.

**Acting Chairman (Senator Gabrielle McFadden):** Go raibh maith agat.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** The Minister of State, Deputy Patrick O'Donovan, has just gone out the door, but I cannot let this opportunity pass without congratulating the Irish soccer team. It was brilliant to watch them play last night. It was a great performance which brought great spirit to the country. Deputy Patrick O'Donovan has taken over my role as Minister of State with responsibility for sport and I am glad that I had all of the hard work done and funding put in place prior to his appointment. That is why the Irish team were so successful.

I thank the Senator for raising this Commencement matter. As he will be aware, the refurbishment of Killarney House and its grounds and gardens was announced in 2011 by a previous Minister, Jimmy Deenihan. The overall value of the project is in the region of €8 million, with Fáilte Ireland providing €5.2 million. I was the one who announced the provision of that €5.2 million when I was Minister of State with responsibility for tourism and sport. I was delighted with the pressure exerted by Senators-----

**Senator Paul Coghlan:** I remember it well.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** -----and the then Minister, Jimmy Deenihan. I put pressure on Fáilte Ireland to make sure the €5.2 million was provided, with the Department providing the remainder. To date, my Department has spent €1.9 million, while over €4.2 million of Fáilte Ireland's provision has been drawn down. My Department has been collaborating with Fáilte Ireland in its role as the national tourism development authority and co-funder of Killarney

House and Gardens and the Office of Public Works which has acted as project manager for the refurbishment. Killarney House will act as the visitor and interpretative centre for Killarney National Park. The interpretative exhibition will highlight the beauty and significance of the park's landscape, habitats, flora and fauna, as well as telling the story of how local people have interacted with the park over the centuries. Within that context, the exhibition will also address the history of the house and its former owners, the Brownes and later the McShains.

The location of Killarney House, in the middle of the town, means that it will be a hugely valuable tourism asset. It will provide a vital link between the town centre and the park. The new landscaped gardens at Killarney House will lead into the natural areas of the park and provide a wonderful view linking the town with the scenery of mountain, wood and water. The availability of a focal point for the park within walking distance of the town will bring wider recognition to the park which is, of course, incredibly popular. Many visitors, even short-stay visitors, wander around the town environs in the evening, especially during the summer.

The refurbished Killarney House in its historic setting and functioning as a national park visitor centre will provide an added attraction for visitors and an excellent opportunity to explain the significance and importance of the park to the south-west region. The refurbishment of the house and the gardens is one of the most significant developments for the local tourism sector in years. The final phase of works to Killarney House began in early January 2014. These works, overseen by the Office of Public Works, included a new extension for the exhibition space and visitor centre, and this is substantially complete. The work on the interpretative centre which will be installed in Killarney House is continuing. The Office of Public Works has also overseen completion of much of the landscaping of the grounds and ornamental gardens. The final phase of the work on the gardens will be completed by mid-August. This phase involves the planting of the central formal garden, the provision of seating and the installation of potted plants in a number of locations. The gardens have been open to the public at weekends since April and will be open to the public on a daily basis from 10 July. They have proved popular, with an estimated 70,000 visitors in the past three months. I expect the House and interpretative exhibition to open to the public in early 2017.

I turn to the future governance and administration of Killarney House. My Department has, with assistance from Fáilte Ireland, commissioned an operational study to examine the future of Killarney House. My Department is examining a draft of this study which will inform our thinking on the future governance of the house and gardens. I know Killarney House, Muckcross House and the area well and this will be a major tourist attraction for the town of Killarney.

I hope I have addressed the Senator's queries.

**Senator Paul Coghlan:** That was a comprehensive reply. I look forward to the Minister of State visiting Killarney House before the year is out to formally open it. Perhaps he might also visit Muckcross House and sign the management agreement with the trustees when it is ready down the line. I thank him and would appreciate it if he commented further on the governance, management and operation of Killarney House because a few questions have arisen locally.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** There are 18 rooms in Killarney House. To be fair to my departmental officials and OPW staff, they are anxious to get this right because it will be a flagship project for the south. I am delighted with it and the Senator has campaigned for it for many years. He contacted me regularly when I held my previous portfolio and had responsibility for Fáilte Ireland to put funding in place for the project. Fáilte Ireland and my Department have

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examined the management structure and produced a report which is being considered. We are looking at ways and means to put the structure in place because that will be the most important aspect. It is one thing to put the project in place, but there also has to be a management structure in place to run it in the years ahead. I will ask my officials to write to the Senator when a decision is made.

The Senator asked me to visit and I intend to do so in July. I would like to see what is happening with the works and will definitely be there in August to open the gardens. I hope to be there next year to formally open this tremendous facility. I visit the area on holidays on a regular basis and the house had been left in a poor state for many years. It will be great for the town and the national park as it is probably one of the finest amenities in the world, one about which the Senator has been vocal for many years. I will see him there in July.

**Senator Paul Coghlan:** I am grateful to the Minister of State. There is a capable regional manager in the form of Mr. Pat Dawson who comes from County Mayo. I look forward to Killarney House being opened, I hope before the end of the year, when everything is ready and the staff are in place. The Minister of State has in place the management and staff in the Department to run it. I look forward to meeting him during his visit.

*Sitting suspended at 11.15 a.m. and resumed at 11.30 a.m.*

### **Order of Business**

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** The Order of Business is No. 1, Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill 2016 - Order for Second Stage and Second Stage, to be taken at 12.45 p.m., with the contributions of all Senators not to exceed six minutes each.

**Senator Mark Daly:** I am sure we all congratulate the Irish soccer team on their performance last night. We all know the famous quote that sport builds character, but what is more true is that sport does not build character as much as it reveals it. What we saw last night was true grit from the Irish team to get a result. The President of Ireland has extended congratulations not only to the management and players but also to the fans who have been true ambassadors for the country. He has also extended congratulations to the other Irish team that have performed so heroically during the tournament and, equally, their fans are ambassadors for the island. On behalf of the House, will the Leader contact both managements and teams to congratulate them on reaching the last 16 in the tournament?

I raise the issue of insurance pricing, the gouging by insurance companies, the profiteering we have seen recently and the absolutely obscene demands being made. Let us take these as the facts. Since the beginning of the year there has been a 20% increase in insurance premiums. In the past 12 months they have increased by 34% and since January 2014 by 60%. If people ring an insurance company today to renew their insurance policy, they will face, at an absolute minimum, a 20% increase. That is with a full no claims bonus and a clean record. There are 2.1 million vehicles on the roads in Ireland and their owners are all required by law, as they should be, to have insurance. However, the price gouging and profiteering we have seen by insurance companies mean that we will all pay more, not only for insurance but also for the services provided by those required to have vehicles on the road to provide services for us. We do not have the 2015 figures, but we know that in 2014 the actual payouts by insurance companies compared to 2011 showed a decrease of 36%. However, we have seen insurance

premiums increase by 60%. We have called for the establishment of a task force. I am sure all Senators agree that the Government needs to take action and regulate. The task force needs to examine why we have seen such price increases and what can be done about it. Is it due to the legal profession which is blamed by the insurance companies? Is it due to payments made by the Injuries Board? Is it due to overregulation? Is it due to fraud? What is the issue? There is no one answer, but one thing the House and the Government can do is to regulate the insurance industry because at this stage it is profiteering and making obscene demands which will cost us all. The House must take a leading role in challenging the industry on what is doing.

**Senator David Norris:** I am not a fan of soccer, but I congratulate the Irish team. It was a really splendid goal; I gather it was a header, but I was not watching the match.

**Senator Kieran O'Donnell:** The Senator's information is very good.

**Senator David Norris:** The result has given the entire nation a lift and I gather the President, His Excellency Michael D. Higgins, was bouncing up and down with joy. It is great to see the Head of State enjoying himself and expressing the delight of the people.

My principal reason for contributing is to propose an amendment to the Order of Business, that we take No. 6, Immigration (Reform) (Regularisation of Residency Status) Bill 2016, before No. 1.

**Senator Rose Conway-Walsh:** I also congratulate the Irish soccer team. It just goes to show that the underdog sometimes wins. We all look forward to what will happen in the next few weeks.

I refer to the vote today in Britain and part of the Thirty-two Counties. I make a final appeal to all those with a vote to vote in Ireland's interests and in favour of the United Kingdom remaining in the European Union. Partition is a barrier to economic growth and social inclusion in Ireland. As a Brexit would compound this, it is important that this message be conveyed in a positive way. Sinn Féin is focused on finding all-Ireland solutions to most of our urgent problems. A Brexit would go against this and certainly not benefit those who most need an all-island approach to health, enterprise and other issues.

I refer to the rural development programme and the Leader programme, particularly the programme for County Mayo which will come onstream in the coming weeks. I am mindful that the budget has been cut by millions of euro. In County Mayo alone €9 million has been cut from it. This is crucial for communities in rural Ireland. While the Government is happy to post updates on issues such as broadband and the spring economic statement, communities are suffering cuts to the multi-annual funding to which I have referred. I call on the Minister of State with responsibility for the roll-out of the Leader programme - we are not yet clear on who it is; perhaps it is the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Ring - to come before the House to enable us to discuss it in a way that would be of most benefit to the communities we serve.

I have expressed many reservations about the political influence that will be exerted on the Leader and rural development programmes. No such influence was exerted when the programmes were managed by local development companies. Given the new format of having the programmes come under county councils, we all have a responsibility to ensure they serve the interests of people on the ground and are not used as a political slush fund. Every project, whether in the community or the enterprise sector, must be treated on its merits and implemented for the economic and social development of communities. I would appreciate it if the

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Leader requested, as a matter of urgency, the Minister to come to the House to discuss the issue.

**Senator Lynn Ruane:** I will take a few moments to draw attention to the amendments proposed in the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill, to be taken this afternoon. The legislation will go through-----

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** The Senator can reserve her speech for the Second Stage debate this afternoon.

**Senator David Norris:** She may make a comment now.

**Senator Lynn Ruane:** If other Senators want to understand the implications of the Bill, they are welcome to speak to me before it is discussed this afternoon.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** I join other Senators in congratulating the Irish soccer team on a wonderful and deserved win against Italy last night. It was a superb match and the team played great. Like many others, my small daughters who play soccer and I were glued to the television. We all wish the team the best of luck on Sunday when they play France. I agree with Senator David Norris that the sight of the President celebrating at the match was wonderful. It was also a good day for Galway United since our Head of State is also its number one fan and has a long track record of interest in and enthusiasm for football.

On a more serious note, on the day Britain votes in the referendum on membership of the European Union, I speak again in support of the “Remain” side. Like other university Senators, I have a large number of constituents who have a vote in the referendum and have been doing all I can to urge them to vote “Remain”. I know that the Irish community in the United Kingdom is generally in favour of Britain remaining in the European Union. It is in Ireland’s interests, including our economic interests, and those of social Europe that we all wish to see progressed that Britain vote to remain in the European Union.

Many of us attended an event in Buswells Hotel yesterday organised by One Foundation at which we met the foundation’s youth ambassadors. It was an interesting event in terms of international development and solidarity issues. I commend One Foundation and other non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam for organising an event at 4 p.m. yesterday on the Ha’penny Bridge which a number of us attended to remember Jo Cox and celebrate her legacy in a minute’s silence.

**Senator Ray Butler:** I congratulate the Irish soccer team on last night’s wonderful performance which brought back memories of 22 years ago when Ray Houghton scored. We have all lost friends and family members who were around at that time and remembered them last night because it was a joyous and wonderful occasion.

Radio reports this morning suggest Ryanair and Aer Lingus will charge €488 for a one-way ticket to Lyons, which means that a round trip will cost almost €1,000. This will price the ordinary man out of attending the match on Saturday, which is a disgrace. I ask both companies to put on the green jersey, reduce their prices and allow everyone who wants to travel to Lyons to do so. I am sure the House will agree that we must not allow the ordinary man to be priced out of the market. I know that Deputy Mick Wallace is in France having a wonderful time because I heard him speak on radio this morning. I wonder why we are all here when we should be in France.

**Senator Kieran O'Donnell:** Perhaps Mick might pay for all of us to go.

**Senator David Norris:** Fat chance.

**Senator Ray Butler:** I ask Ryanair and Aer Lingus to, please, reduce their prices and let the ordinary person travel to Lyons. If nothing else, we will shame them into doing so.

**Senator David Norris:** We will like hell.

**Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor:** I, too, congratulate the Irish soccer team.

Like previous speakers, I was taken aback by a report in this morning's edition of the *Irish Examiner* under the headline "Harmful drinking is the 'norm' in this country and causes three deaths every day". The report notes that new data released by the Health Research Board show that young drinkers aged from 18 to 24 years have the most harmful drinking habits in the country. It continues:

The quantity they drink and the pattern of their drinking is putting them at increased health risk at a young age, and later in life, according to the study.

The research found alcohol is responsible for up to three deaths every day and that 50% of Irish drinking can be described as binge-drinking...

Alcohol Action Ireland said the latest research shows that the nation's attitude to alcohol is placing an unsustainable burden on the health service and taxpayer.

The reason I raise the issue is the statement by Alcohol Action Ireland that the "Public Health (Alcohol) Bill is the first legislation of its kind in Ireland, as it treats alcohol as the serious public health problem". We need more information on this legislation. In 2014 Irish drinkers consumed on average 11 litres of pure alcohol each, which is equal to 29 litres of vodka, 116 bottles of wine or 445 pints of beer. It is not only how much Irish people drink that causes harm but the way they drink. In 2013 the HRB alcohol diary survey showed that more than 50% of Irish drinkers consumed alcohol in a harmful manner, too much alcohol in one sitting and more than the recommended number of standard drinks in one week. We must find out more about the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill from the Minister because society must address these harmful effects. An evidence based public health response is needed, of which the measures proposed in the Bill are an example. I ask the Leader to seek answers from the Minister on this issue and invite him to come to the House to address this serious problem. The drinking behaviour of young people aged from 18 to 24 years has serious consequences for their health and families. For this reason, we must address the long-term implications of this behaviour.

**Senator Maura Hopkins:** I raise the important issue of rehabilitation services. This morning I attended the launch of a campaign by the Neurological Alliance of Ireland under the title "We need our heads examined". We do. I joined my colleagues, Senator Maria Byrne and Deputy Maria Bailey, to support health care professionals, patients and families who were fighting for better quality rehabilitation services. Every year, 25,000 people need rehabilitation services for neurological conditions such as stroke, acquired brain injury, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease. There are major gaps in the service which is under-resourced and underfunded.

Three steps must be taken. First, proper inpatient rehabilitation facilities are required to



allow patients to gain timely specialist access to rehabilitation services. Second, better and properly resourced community rehabilitation teams are needed because the current teams are *ad hoc* and fragmented. Third, long-term rehabilitation-specific services are required to help people who are coping with a long-term disability. I stand with the Neurological Alliance of Ireland in calling for better rehabilitation services for everyone.

Action must be taken on foot of the neuro-rehabilitation strategy published in 2011. I ask that the Minister for Health, Deputy Simon Harris, address the House on this important issue. Significant improvements have been made in acute care services and further improvements are also needed in rehabilitation services.

With regard to services in the west, the rehabilitation unit planned for Roscommon County Hospital must progress as quickly as possible. I ask that a project team be appointed without delay to progress this plan and ensure the needs of those who require rehabilitation services, many of whom do not have a voice, are met. They are trying to cope with their illness or disability and we need to advocate on their behalf. I am doing so and will continue to do so until we see action.

**Senator Gerard P. Craughwell:** I second the request made by my colleague, Senator David Norris, that No. 6, Immigration (Reform) (Regularisation of Residency Status) Bill 2016, be taken before No. 1.

In recent days I have suffered from a condition of almost sudden deafness in one ear. The other one was never good. Yesterday afternoon I came into the House to participate in a debate on waste disposal and was appalled by what I saw. We had invited a Minister to come to address the issue of waste disposal and listen to our views and then proceeded to abuse and shout at him. It got to the stage where I could no longer tolerate the level of noise in the room and left. I was, therefore, denied an opportunity to speak about the issue yesterday. Incidentally, I would have supported Sinn Féin's position, but I was denied an opportunity to do so. That is something I did not experience in the previous Seanad and I did not experience it in my time chairing meetings at trade union level, both within the Teachers Union of Ireland and across the four teacher unions. We should never invite somebody to the House to shout at them. We give them all the stick they deserve on legislation. I see Senator Paudie Coffey looking at me. He took some stick in the previous Dáil-----

**Senator Paudie Coffey:** A fair share.

**Senator Gerard P. Craughwell:** -----but we should do so in a respectful way. I ask the Leader to call the leaders of groups and the Whips together to discuss the issue of discipline and how we behave in the House. We are Members of the Upper House of the Oireachtas, Seanad Éireann. We are supposed to be grand old advisers to the young guns in the Lower House to calm their ire and slow them down a little, but last night we would have made a first year class of hooligans look respectable. We should all sit down and consider the way we do our business. I looked at the Leas-Chathaoirleach and the person who replaced him and felt sorry for them because it is extremely difficult to chair any meeting. Seeing a chairman struggling to get people to be quiet is simply not what the people expect of their parliamentarians. I ask that we all examine the way we do our business.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** The behaviour of Members is a matter for the Cathaoirleach who is off today, but I will have a word with him.

**Senator Gerard P. Craughwell:** I thank the Leas-Chathaoirleach.

**Senator Kieran O'Donnell:** I join other Senators in congratulating the Republic of Ireland soccer team. It was the bravery of Robbie Brady and the skill of Wes Hoolahan that resulted in the goal being scored. It was almost more significant than the goal scored by Ray Houghton because it was scored literally at the death. They were under the cosh, but the result was fantastic. This may be a question for the Clerk of the Seanad, but there are two soccer teams on the island, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, both of which have made it through to the last 16 in the tournament. They are supported by 6 million people and have gone through to the next round. Is the Seanad honouring this achievement allowed for under Standing Orders? Nothing brings people together more than sport. We could hold a form of civic reception for both teams-----

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** That is a matter for the Committee on Procedure and Privileges.

**Senator Mark Daly:** On a point of information-----

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** A point of order.

**Senator Mark Daly:** -----Standing Orders are silent on the issue. If he so chooses, the Leader could suspend Standing Orders to send congratulations to the two teams.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** With respect, it is a matter for the Committee on Procedure and Privileges.

**Senator Kieran O'Donnell:** It is of such significance in terms of symbolism that we, as Members of the Seanad, should look to see if it is possible to bring the two teams to the Houses of Parliament for a form of civic reception to honour them. I am making that request.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** We will raise the matter with the Committee on Procedure and Privileges.

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** Éirím le labhairt faoin bhua aréir. Tá sé ráite ag a lán daoine cheana féin. I wish to be associated with the remarks made in congratulating the Irish team on the win last night. Senator Kieran O'Donnell's proposal is interesting because it is important that we have an opportunity to honour and recognise the achievements of the two teams and, in turn, the supporters who have represented the country so well. Before I left it to join this august institution, we agreed at Belfast City Council to host the two teams at Belfast City Hall. We might, therefore, bring the Members of the Seanad to Belfast City Hall when Belfast City Council is doing the honour. I jest.

**Senator Kieran O'Donnell:** Equally, it is welcome in the South.

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** It is a good proposal and I support it.

Let me expand on the congratulations. Important points have been made about health issues and I suppose the darker side of the culture associated with sport. A discussion worth having is how we can utilise sport development in health promotion - the Minister could be invited to the House for a debate on the issue - because the two naturally complement each other. Someone who is good at sports and is training, whether for his or her local GAA club, boxing club or soccer club, is instilled very early in life with how to treat his or her body and community with respect. That is something on which the two Ministers on the island could work to promote. I

believe there was an all-island men's health promotion last week. That is something at which we could look to initiate a specific discussion. The Ulster Council of the GAA previously conducted an overt health promotion campaign among GAA players entitled, Drink, Drugs & Sausage Rolls, to instill in young GAA athletes how to look after themselves and avoid some of the dangers posed.

I make the point which my leader made previously that this is the day of the referendum on Brexit. At the conclusion of business I will leave to go up the road to vote and I will vote in favour of the United Kingdom remaining in the European Union. It is a very considered position. As a society in the North-----

**Senator David Norris:** Excellent. Unionist Sinn Féin.

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** Imagine that.

**Senator David Norris:** I think it is great.

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** I am more in favour of a Brexit from Ireland, but we will have a discussion about that matter on another day. If Members or anyone watching these proceedings have or has friends or family in the North, I call on them to get on the telephone, go on Facebook or text them about voting.

**Senator Grace O'Sullivan:** The Leas-Chathaoirleach might be aware that a number of US Representatives and Senators have begun a sit-in at the US House of Representatives. They started yesterday and the aim of their effort is to force Congress to finally consider introducing stricter gun controls. I offer my support to them in making their request, remembering, in particular, those who died in Orlando and, closer to home, the violent death of the MP, Jo Cox. I ask the House to join me in supporting the action which is led by the US Representative from Georgia, Mr. John Lewis, who is no stranger to organising sit-ins.

**Senator Aidan Davitt:** Comhghairdeas leis an Aire nua. I wish to be associated with the comments made by my party's acting leader, Senator Mark Daly, on the great success of the two Irish teams in Euro 2016. Long may it continue.

I raise a matter of great concern to do with Mullingar Army barracks. I call on the Leader to ask the Government to immediately invest in Mullingar. As he will know, the barracks has been closed for a number of years and been used by different groups, but there are serious concerns about the condition of the barracks, which is grave. At a minimum, it is a health and safety concern.

*12 o'clock*

It is being used by several groups in the community, including Westmeath GAA. It would be an ideal location for a museum, an issue which has been discussed many times.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** I am sorry to interrupt, but this would be a suitable subject for a Commencement matter. The Senator might consider doing so.

**Senator Aidan Davitt:** We can expand on it next time.

**Senator David Norris:** That was just an appetiser before the debate.

**Senator Aidan Davitt:** I am always open to receiving the Leas-Chathaoirleach's great

advice - such wisdom. However, I have serious concerns. The Deputy for the area, Deputy Robert Troy, has called a public meeting after being asked to chair one by various community groups. It will be held in the barracks tonight. This is a live issue in Mullingar and must be addressed. We need a plan, albeit not the one in Kildare, which was to sell. The location of the barracks is ideal and there is only a small amount of land attached to it. There must be some investment. We cannot just wring our hands and throw it to the wolves. Does the Leader have ideas in this regard and is there a plan for the barracks?

**Senator Frank Feighan:** I support my colleague, Senator Maura Hopkins, in calling for the money for rehabilitation services to be reallocated. A total of €7.85 million was allocated a year ago and it must be put to use immediately.

For anyone who is not familiar with what has happened at Roscommon County Hospital, €20 million has been spent on it in the past five years; the endoscopy unit is open; there is an air ambulance service; rehabilitation services comprise a further project being planned, while the Mayo Roscommon Hospice is building an eight-bed palliative care unit. One would not believe it, but the only problem at the hospital now is that there are not enough parking spaces to meet the increased capacity. If ever Senators are driving through Roscommon, I urge them to call to see what is a most wonderful facility. After five years of negativity, the hospital is now much safer. They should speak to the consultants and managers. Sometimes good news never gets out and we only hear the bad news. Do not ask me - ask the consultants and managers at the hospital.

Was last night not amazing? The President showed great enthusiasm and vigour. Seeing him there summed up everything. We are very proud of him. I was on a double-decker bus 28 years ago when the Republic of Ireland played England in Stuttgart. It brought great confidence to the country. I want the British to remain in the European Union and hope they will vote that way, but every morning I now wake up I think to myself that it has been 28 years since we beat England and that it is a great day. The French media, in commenting on Northern Ireland and Republic fans, stated that, in terms of football, Ireland was unified. One person mentioned that watching the two sets of supporters was good for the soul. That is good news. Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill will agree that this will translate in future marching seasons, but we must build on it and not be afraid. The Seanad should shout this good news loudly because we have come a long way.

**Senator Robbie Gallagher:** I join Senators in congratulating the Irish soccer team on a fabulous performance last night. It is fair to say that we on these islands are not blessed with the most gifted of footballers, but they are gifted with heart and determination which they showed in abundance last night. In discussing bravery we should also mention the team management of Martin O'Neill and Roy Keane. They made brave decisions in their team selection. While they were heroes at full time, they were within five minutes of being pilloried by the media today. It was a thin line and they deserve compliments.

The real winners are the supporters. Pictures of their smiling faces beaming across our television screens last night were a joy to behold. The manner in which supporters from the Republic and the North have conducted themselves has been a credit to them. I listened to the French ambassador on a radio station this morning. He mentioned the headlines that the fans were making. He stated that, if there were a cup for the best supporters, it could be handed to the Irish people now. We can feel very proud of this. They are a credit to the nation. The mayors of Paris, Bordeaux and Lille have all discussed the way in which the Irish have con-

ducted themselves. The supporters deserve credit. The joy and satisfaction that the team and supporters have given us have lifted the nation. This shows the power of sport, what it can do, how it can strengthen people and the joy that it can give. My son was lucky enough to be in the stadium last night. He told me that everywhere he looked, people were hugging and smiling at complete strangers. It was a super experience for those who were fortunate enough to enjoy it.

For a small nation, we punch above our weight in sport. Every euro that the nation spends on sport is worth twice as much to us. This weekend we will have the joy of watching Northern Ireland play Wales on Saturday and the Republic play France on Sunday. I hope we will see joy after the Henry handball incident which I am sure has been mentioned several times.

**Senator Kieran O'Donnell:** Karma.

**Senator Robbie Gallagher:** The under 20s rugby team will be playing in the World Cup final against England on Saturday. Combined with all of the GAA matches, sport is fantastic and we are fortunate.

On a more local level, Monaghan General Hospital closed more than a decade ago, causing stress and annoyance for the people of that county. At the time, the HSE announced that a new primary care centre would be built in Monaghan to address the issues that surrounded the hospital going off call. More than a decade later, we are still waiting for that facility to be built but not one block has been laid and people are concerned. Will the Leader ask the Minister for Health to address the provision of this much-needed facility?

**Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:** I second what my colleague, Senator Gerard P. Craughwell, had to say. This is the Upper House of the State's Legislature. Some people may not view it as such, but I do. I respect it and I am privileged and grateful to be here. I intend to use it in a civil way. It is not a place for the shouting, catcalling and booing that we heard yesterday. It is a place for argument, discussion, debate, communication and, above all, listening. The behaviour in front of our gentleman Minister, Deputy Simon Coveney, was outrageous. I did not enter the Chamber because I did not want to be seen looking on silently. Using our technology without discretion is an affront to human communication, as is sometimes the case when the Leader is answering questions while the Members who asked them are texting on their phones. The lack of acknowledgement of the Chair on the way in and out of the Chamber is appalling. If one was leaving a kitchen or one's sitting room when visitors or friends were present, one would say, "Excuse me," or give some indication that one wanted to leave or enter in the middle of a conversation. The casual use of this Chamber as if it was some kind of inn, tavern, well, bus stop or snug at the back of a pub is appalling. Some Senators ask tortured and urgent questions as if their lives depended on them, but they do not even bother to wait for an answer from the Leader who goes to a great deal of trouble to try to understand what they are saying and accommodate what they are seeking. That is outrageous. I do not want to be part of such a House, such a lack of civility, such a lack of standards, such bad manners and such a lack of respect. Neither do I want to be part of that visualisation on national and international television. This is the Upper House of Parliament and we need to show example. Who will take us seriously if our manners and level of respect are so lacking? In my history of working in communications the one thing that got different politics and ideas across was civility. I intend to make this speech every day next week until we recognise some standard here.

**Senator Maria Byrne:** I join colleagues in congratulating the Irish soccer team. As a keen sportsperson who has travelled worldwide to many matches, I support Senator Ray Butler's

motion that calls on Aer Lingus and Ryanair to reconsider their prices because they discourage people from travelling to matches. It is a disgrace that people are being asked to pay upwards of €1,000 to fly to France for just one day.

This morning I attended a campaign launch organised by the Neurological Alliance of Ireland with my colleague, Senator Maura Hopkins. I support her call that the Minister for Health come here to address the issue. One thing I learned this morning at the event was that, by European standards, Ireland should have 270 inpatient beds. We have less than half that number in the whole country. Another stark fact that I learned was that there were no regional inpatient specialist rehabilitation centres in the entire country. There are only three community rehabilitation teams in the entire country, but European standards recommend that a country with a population of this size should have nine. We badly need these matters to be addressed.

**Senator Paul Gavan:** I join all colleagues in congratulating the two teams that have done us proud in the past few days. I am looking forward to the match on Sunday, in particular, and hope there will be a positive result, but regardless of the result, we will support our team. It would be nice to get back at France for the infamous hand ball incident.

Yesterday I met Mr. Kevin Donoghue, president of the USI. We spoke about its key issues and core requests. We, in Sinn Féin, stand with it in support of its key demands. It has simply asked for affordable third level education, but we do not have that in this country. Instead, we have hundreds of students dropping out of third level education because they cannot afford the registration fees. The USI has carried out a study of fees that shows almost nine out of ten students fear dropping out of college owing to financial reasons. Students are missing lectures and working during exam seasons just to scramble to get enough money together to pay their fees. The stress this puts on students is pushing them to breaking point, with three out of four students saying they have considered dropping out. The fear that these students live with is a direct result of regressive education cuts made by the last Government and, unfortunately, it appears to be continuing under the new Government. I ask the Leader to call the Minister for Education and Skills into the House to debate this important issue.

**Senator James Reilly:** I, too, congratulate the Irish soccer teams for their superb performances to date, in particular the Republic of Ireland's team and their management. I congratulate the fans because they are probably the best advertisement for tourism that this country could ever have. Their outstanding behaviour, generosity and sense of fun and craic have been acknowledged. They have shown that people can have a good time without causing problems for others.

I echo what Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell said, with the following line. If one seeks to learn, one has got to listen. Yesterday the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government came here to speak, but he was continually interrupted. I fail to see how the Senator concerned can learn anything if he is not prepared to listen.

Today I wish to raise the same issue as the acting leader on the far side, Senator Mark Daly. I am being kind when I say the insurers are behaving in a very peculiar fashion in the premia they are trying to extract. I know people who got quotes recently that were double what they were paying. Therefore, it would be appropriate for the Leader to invite the Committee of Public Accounts to invite the insurers to attend a meeting. I am fully aware of the fact that the committee cannot force the insurers to attend, but their response to the invitation would speak volumes about their attitude to the public.

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**Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill:** I wish to be associated with the remarks, made by the vast majority of Members, congratulating the Irish soccer teams. In particular, I congratulate the Republic of Ireland or FAI team and wish them well on Sunday. Last night's result was magnificent. The players showed real determination and heart. The management got their tactics right and deserve credit, as do the fans. I agree with all of the complimentary remarks made about the fans. I heard the interview given by the French ambassador this morning. He outlined that all of the French media had paid high tributes to the Irish fans above all others. We should all recognise that the Irish fans are acting as ambassadors during Euro 2016.

I wish to touch on another issue. Today the Brexit vote takes place in the North and across the water and the result will have huge political and economical consequences for the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the European Union. Unfortunately, other threats have emerged in the European Union. For example, there is a high dependence on the German economy and Nordic countries. Also, the less well-off countries such as Spain, Greece, Portugal and Italy are in a state of negative equity, with a negative balance sheet of almost €1.5 trillion. I call for a twofold debate on the European project. We should have one debate on the euro and eurozone and another on the European Union. The European Union comprises more than just the eurozone countries. There are question marks about solidarity and the European Union meeting the principles that led to its establishment in the 1950s under the Treaty of Rome. We must question whether it currently meets its founding principles in the solidarity being shown and the humanitarian aid being provided for Syrian refugees and others. I suggest we hold a twofold debate. There is an economic argument and also a humanitarian-solidarity side. It may not be possible, however, to have the debate before the recess. I ask the Leader to arrange for it to take place as quickly as possible because the economic stability of the European Union will be a major issue in the next six to 12 months.

**Senator Colm Burke:** I, too, congratulate both Irish soccer teams. It is a great achievement for them to reach the final 16 in Euro 2016. I say, "Well done," to everyone concerned - the management, players and their backup support.

I refer to an important Supreme Court decision issued in the past few days as it concerns checks and balances. I advise everyone to read the decision. I refer to a case in which the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977, SI No. 551 of 2011, was declared unconstitutional by the Court of Appeal. The Supreme Court overturned that decision in the past few days and set out clear guidelines for secondary legislation. It advised that there must be checks and balances. It means that when we delegate powers, we must ensure there are clear boundaries when dealing with legislation. I will refer to the decision because it is relevant to all of us. From now on, when dealing with legislation, we must not delegate too many power and must retain our role in providing for legislative oversight. Were the Oireachtas required to legislate for every aspect of a particular statutory scheme, it would quickly become mired in detail and the task of predicting future developments precisely, as opposed to legislating for existing trends which might change in terms of detail. Instead of continually re-legislating, primary legislation should set boundaries as to what could be provided for in subsidiary legislation. This would allow subsidiary legislation to be flexible and address future developments. In this way no derogation from the constitutional imperative to exercise the democratic function would be involved. It is suggested we can delegate, but it is important that we retain our right to ensure a matter is kept under the control of the Oireachtas. The judgment is important in that it sets clear boundaries for what we can delegate and how we control the derogation. This highlights the importance of our role and that of Dáil Éireann. Certainly, the Supreme Court has outlined the powers we can delegate

to Ministers to ensure statutory instruments do not go beyond the powers delegated to them.

**Senator Paudie Coffey:** I wish to be associated with all the words of congratulation to the two Irish soccer teams. It is a great day to be Irish. I was proud to see them qualify and reach the last 16 in the European championship. It was a marvellous day and uplifting for the country.

I concur with Senator Ray Butler in what we are seeing with the airlines and what I would call the exploitation of our fans. They are ordinary people who have saved up, wish to support our national teams and be associated with their successes on and off the field. There is exploitation and I call on the Leader to ask the airlines to be fair. All anyone is asking for is for them to be fair and allow people to attend to support their national team.

I take the opportunity to mention another great national sports event which took place last weekend and one with which I was closely associated. The national Féile na nGael championships took place in Waterford and Tipperary when hundreds of young teams played hurling, camogie and handball. Teams throughout the island, north, south, east and west, came together to build new friendships. While competing on the field of play, thousands of youngsters created friendships which will last for the rest of their lives. They had congregated in counties Tipperary and Waterford for what was truly a remarkable national event. I express my appreciation to the GAA and all of the volunteers, coaches, parents and mentors who give of their time freely to organise such events. This aspect often goes unnoticed. I highlight in Parliament what an event such as this does for young people. It is a great national event. The same applies to rugby, soccer and many minority sports. Members have spoken this morning about the ability of sport to build bridges. Youngsters learn to build new relationships, networks and teams throughout their adult lives and it will stand to them forevermore.

I call on the Leader to organise a debate on the funding of third level colleges, universities and institutes of technology. Funding is essential if we are to equip graduates to the best level possible to compete globally and internationally. They must have access to the best equipment, research facilities, laboratories and engineering equipment. I have heard concerns expressed by representatives of industry. Unfortunately, in recent years because of cutbacks, facilities and equipment have been affected. I call on the Leader to invite the Minister for Education and Skills to come to the House to debate this critical issue. If we are to have the best graduates, colleges need to be properly equipped. I am, therefore, calling for a debate on the matter.

**Senator Ned O'Sullivan:** I have timed it well. I see that the Leas-Chathaoirleach has taken up the cudgels on my behalf in dealing with the matter of seagulls. I am glad that it is in safe hands.

Will the Leader arrange for the relevant Minister to come to the House to discuss the issue of energy security? I am asking the question, in particular, because of the threat to our gas supply posed by the ever-perilous situation in eastern Europe. For example, the supply from Ukraine is anything but assured. As the Leas-Chathaoirleach is aware, a sizeable delegation from County Kerry was present in Leinster House yesterday to discuss the proposed liquefied natural gas terminal in the Shannon Estuary. The project has been on the books for some time and I referred to it several times during the last term. It has never been more advantageous and timely for the project to come on stream with the support of one of the major global providers. Sometimes gas supplies from the interior of landlocked countries, for example, African and Asian states, cannot be piped. However, gas can be liquefied and transported in huge liners up along the Shannon Estuary where it can be degasified in a process to create energy. This will



assure us long-term energy security. Will the Leader ask the relevant Minister to come to the House? In fact, there are two Ministers involved, but I reckon the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Denis Naughten, would be the most appropriate. He could outline his views on the matter. In the previous Government the former Minister, Pat Rabbitte, was close to doing something, but it did not quite materialise. I hope the Leader can facilitate my request.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** I will begin by joining the 14 Senators who referred to the European football championship. I join them in congratulating the Irish team on their performance last night. A nation held its breath for the last five minutes of the match, plus injury time. It was a great result and I congratulate Martin O'Neill and Roy Keane, as well as Michael O'Neill and his team on their success. It is important that we celebrate the victory sensibly and pay tribute to the team for their display. Many had given them no chance and, if I am to be honest, I was one of them. However, by their character and skill, they ensured a great result. We talk about the result in Stuttgart in 1988 or the Giants Stadium in New York in 1994, but in this case Wes Hoolahan will be remembered forever.

Senators Ray Butler, Paudie Coffey and James Reilly referred to the cost of flights. It is disappointing and unacceptable that airlines are gazumping or engaging in price gouging to make profits at the cost of fans. Our fans have been renowned throughout Europe, both this week and last week, for their sense of fair play, fun, revelry and decency. It is a pity, therefore, that the airlines are engaging in this activity to maximise profits. It is exploitation at its worst. I call on Aer Lingus and Mr. Michael O'Leary of Ryanair, a good contributor to Irish sport in his own right, to recognise the importance of the match next Sunday. I will write to them as Leader of the Seanad and hope the House is united in calling on Ryanair and Aer Lingus not to exploit fans or engage in gazumping but to encourage them to travel by laying on extra flights. This would help to create a carnival next weekend when we can overturn what happened in the Henry hand ball incident some years ago. It is an important issue. It is about the airlines this week and next week could be about the cost of hotel rooms for those attending concerts. We have to get real. I, therefore, appeal to Ryanair and Aer Lingus to work with the Football Association of Ireland and the Irish Football Association to encourage our fans to travel. It is important that they do this.

Senators Mark Daly and James Reilly raised the issue of the cost of car insurance. I very much agree with them that costs have spiralled upwards. As I have stated in the House already this week, this is the reason the Minister for Finance has asked officials in his Department to put together a review of policy which will involve the Department of Finance, the Central Bank, other Departments and agencies and the insurance industry in examining the factors that are contributing to the exorbitant increase in the cost of motor insurance. The group could then produce a set of recommendations to yield an improvement in the functioning and regulation of the insurance sector. The Senators are right. It is important that the matter be examined as part of a comprehensive review to benefit the motorist and person who needs car insurance. We should work to ensure people are insured appropriately and properly and that we will not see an increase in the number driving without insurance.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh referred to the Leader programme. This week the Minister announced funding for the Leader 2020 rural development programme. A total of €250 million will be available for investment in rural enterprises and communities. The funding will be provided based on a strategic approach and priorities agreed at local level. I have spoken to the Minister for Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Heather

Humphreys, and the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Ring, about the issue and can assure the Senator that the latter, in particular, will not be found wanting when it comes to County Mayo. As matters stand, 80 strategies have been finalised, with more to come. This is an opportunity to invest in rural Ireland to attract enterprise and promote job creation in local tourism and community development projects. I will ask the Minister or the Minister of State to come to the House to discuss the opportunities the programme will present.

A number of Senators referred to Brexit. It is very important, even at the eleventh hour, to appeal to people in Northern Ireland and across Britain to vote to remain in the European Union. It is very important to us as a country, economically, as it is to the European Union, that they do. Whatever our concerns about the European Union, the old Irish saying, *Ní neart go cur le chéile*, applies today. It is important that we stand together. The European Union is better with the United Kingdom inside rather than outside. The United Kingdom is our most important trading partner and it is important to us that it remain within the European Union. Again, I appeal to those Members who have not already done so to engage with their friends and relatives across the United Kingdom and ask them to vote to remain.

I am very happy to accept Senator David Norris's proposed amendment to the Order of Business.

Senators Gerard P. Craughwell, Marie-Louise O'Donnell and James Reilly raised the matter of decorum in the Chamber. It is important that, as Members of the Upper House, we debate issues with decorum and good manners. As someone who is known to have engaged in raucous behaviour in the House in a previous life, on mature reflection-----

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** We cannot discuss that matter now.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** While I may sound like poacher turned gamekeeper, it is important that we debate and engage on issues properly. The Senators are right that we must conduct our business in a dignified manner and a way that befits Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas. I watched some of the debate in the Chamber yesterday and was disappointed. To be fair, the Minister had come to listen and engage with us and for us-----

**Senator David Norris:** He got a bit of a going over from the Labour Party also.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** The term pot and kettle also applies to Labour Party Members. It was a Labour Party Minister who signed the statutory instrument, but we will not go back over that matter now. I will discuss the issue raised with the Whips at our next meeting and ask them to ensure we conduct our business in a manner that befits Members of the House. I thank the Senators for raising it.

The use of mobile devices in the Chamber is a matter for consideration by the Committee on Procedure and Privileges. Sometimes I am just noting on my iPad the point being made by a speaker and do not mean to be rude. I think Senator Gerard P. Craughwell thought I was not listening to him, but I was. That is the main reason I use my iPad and apologise if it appears to be rude.

Senator Lynn Ruane referred to the Bill to be discussed this afternoon. I look forward to the debate on it.

Senator Ivana Bacik made reference to the event organised by One Foundation. It was a

good one and I am sorry that I missed it as the foundation is doing great work.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor raised the issue of alcohol misuse. She is right that alcohol is the very harmful drug of choice for many of us, but the issue is being addressed by the Government. The Public Health (Alcohol Bill) has been restored to the Order Paper. While it will not be taken before the summer recess, it is in train and was subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by the health committee, of which I was a member in the last Oireachtas. I would be happy to speak to the Senator and provide her with further information on what is a very important issue about which we must keep talking in order to raise awareness.

Senators Maura Hopkins and Maria Byrne referred to rehabilitation services. I am happy to invite the Minister for Health to come to the House to discuss the issue. A strategy has been developed, but there are questions about its implementation, on which we must follow up.

Senators Maura Hopkins and Frank Feighan referred to the situation at Roscommon County Hospital. While it could be the subject of a Commencement matter, I am happy to ask the Minister for Health to come to the House to discuss the issue.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile raised the issues of sport promotion and North-South relations and co-operation. It is imperative that we use Healthy Ireland, the framework created by the former Minister for Health, Senator James Reilly, and the special action group created under it to work on a joint implementation strategy.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell made an important point about the lack of a State awards system to honour our sports heroes, North and South. I hope the Committee on Procedure and Privileges will consider the matter and break new ground. Why can we not be bold and ambitious and introduce such a system? It is an important issue, on which the Senator made a very fine point.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan raised the important issue of gun control, a matter which, thankfully, does not arise here. Members of the United States Congress are engaged in a sit-in, led by Congressman John Lewis, a renowned parliamentarian and activist whom I had the privilege to meet a number of years ago. We spoke about the issue of gun control in the wake of events in Orlando and I hope it will form part of the bilateral discussions between the Government and the US Vice President Joe Biden.

Senator Aidan Davitt referred to the Army barracks in Mullingar, for which a strategy was put in place. It is being reviewed and the Taoiseach has been in contact with Senator Gabrielle McFadden on the matter. I agree with Senator Aidan Davitt that the barracks should either be used or sold. The Army barracks in Ballincollig in Cork city was sold. As a result, the town has grown exponentially and is now one of the jewels in the crown for Cork County Council. Perhaps that model might be considered for use in Mullingar.

Senator Robbie Gallagher spoke about primary care services in County Monaghan. I am happy to raise the matter with the Minister for Health and invite him to come to the House to discuss it. I encourage the Senator to raise by way of a Commencement matter. Primary care services are the way forward. While I hate to single anyone out, when Senator James Reilly was Minister for Health, he was a pioneer in promoting primary care services, although he was often criticised. There are now over 90 primary care centres throughout the country, but if there are deficits, they must be addressed.

Senators Paul Gavan and Paudie Coffey raised the issue of the funding of third level educa-

tion. The Minister for Education and Skills will come to the House before the summer recess to discuss education issues. It is important that we improve access to education and fund third level education adequately. The Senators referred to the USI president, Mr. Kevin Donoghue, whose term of office will come to an end soon. I pay tribute to him because he has been a very impressive president of the USI. He has been impartial in his dealings with us and very fair and assertive in representing students, for which I commend him. I wish him well.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill raised the very important topic of the euro and suggested that in the context of the Brexit referendum it would be opportune to have a debate on the European Union. I hope the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Dara Murphy, will be able to come to the House to engage in such a debate. I will put the matter on the agenda.

Senator Colm Burke referred to the recent Supreme Court ruling in the context of the need for checks and balances. That is a matter I will take up with the Committee on Procedure and Privileges because it is important.

Senator Paudie Coffey made reference to Féile na nGael which took place last weekend. It is a tremendous competition and those of us involved in the GAA understand and recognise its importance. I commend all those involved, including the host clubs and the families involved. I also commend clubs for preparing their young players and Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, through its uachtarán Aogán Ó Fearghail, for the work it has done in promoting its games among the under-14s.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan raised the issue of energy security. I agree that we should have a debate on this important matter. Any such debate should include a discussion on the Whitegate refinery and of future plans for that facility.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** Senator David Norris has proposed an amendment to the Order of Business: “That No. 6 be taken before No. 1.” The Leader has indicated that he is prepared to accept the amendment. Is it agreed to? Agreed.

Order of Business, as amended, agreed to.

### **Immigration (Reform) (Regularisation of Residency Status) Bill 2016: First Stage**

**Senator David Norris:** I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to provide for the regularisation of the residency status of persons who have applied for refugee status and/or subsidiary protection if four years following the submission of such an application the application remains undetermined and to provide for related matters.

**Senator Gerard P. Craughwell:** I second the proposal.

Question put and agreed to.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** When is it proposed to take Second Stage?

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**Senator David Norris:** Next Tuesday.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** Is that agreed? Agreed.

Second Stage ordered for Tuesday, 28 June 2016.

*Sitting suspended at 12.40 p.m. and resumed at 12.50 p.m.*

### **Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill 2016: Order for Second Stage**

Bill entitled an Act to amend and extend the law relating to the prevention of the misuse of certain dangerous or otherwise harmful drugs and for those purposes to amend the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977 to provide for the control of additional substances; to make further provision for the transfer of functions relating to the grant of licences under that Act from the Minister for Health to the Health Products Regulatory Authority; to revoke certain statutory instruments; and to provide for related matters.

**Senator Colm Burke:** I move: “That Second Stage be taken now.”

Question put and agreed to.

### **Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill 2016: Second Stage**

Question proposed: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am pleased to present this Bill to amend the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977. I hope that, with the co-operation of Senators and Deputies, it will be possible to have this short but important legislation enacted before the Houses rise for the summer recess. The primary focus of the misuse of drugs legislation is the protection of public health through the prevention of the misuse of dangerous substances. This legislation is also an important element of the Government’s arsenal in the fight against drug dealing and trafficking and consequent gangland crime.

I am presenting the Bill as one part of the whole-of-government approach to dealing with serious crime in the north inner city of Dublin. Following the recent murders in Dublin’s north inner city, the Government decided to expedite the drafting and publication of parts of the Misuse of Drugs Bill originally scheduled for the autumn. Accordingly, the primary purpose in bringing the Bill forward at this time is to aid the law enforcement functions of An Garda Síochána in tackling crime associated with the illegal sale of certain substances. These are dangerous substances if used incorrectly and every effort must be made to prevent their unlawful sale.

The misuse of drugs legislation has two primary purposes. First, it aims to protect the public by controlling access to substances which have a medical and therapeutic value but which are harmful if misused such as benzodiazepines, heroin and cocaine. The legislation facilitates the safe use of these controlled drugs by means of ministerial regulations and orders but provides that it is an offence to possess or sell them, unless authorised to do so under the regulations.

Second, the legislation aims to protect the public by establishing a system of tight control over dangerous and harmful substances with no therapeutic or other legitimate use. Well

known examples would be ecstasy or headshop drugs. These drugs are often manufactured by persons who try to stay ahead of the law by making relatively minor changes to the molecular structure and chemical formula of a known drug to produce one which may not be controlled and, in effect, produce one which is legal. The fact that it is legal, however, does not mean it is safe. Accordingly, it is important we regularly update drugs legislation and, where appropriate, include generic definitions which potentially cover a large number of substances, some of which have not yet appeared on the streets.

The substances controlled under legislation are listed in the Schedule to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977 which was amended in March last year by emergency legislation which was enacted following a Court of Appeal judgment. The court had struck down the section in the 1977 Act under which the Government could make orders declaring substances to be controlled. As a consequence, all substances controlled by successive Governments since 1977 became legal to possess. The 2015 emergency legislation recontrolled all of these substances. It also confirmed several ministerial regulations and orders made under the Act, thereby giving the instruments statutory effect as though they were an Act of the Oireachtas.

The State appealed the judgment to the Supreme Court which handed down its judgment yesterday in which it stated the Court of Appeal judgment should be set aside. This judgment is most welcome, as it means future control of substances under the Act can once again be made by means of Government order. The rationale for the control of substances under the Bill is still sound, given that we did not know when the court would hand down its judgment until recently, nor could we be sure it would uphold the constitutionality of the legislation.

There is a problem in parts of Dublin and elsewhere in Ireland with the on-street sale of prescription medicines. This is especially true in the case of some medicines not controlled under the misuse of drugs legislation such as zopiclone, a legitimate medicine used for the treatment of insomnia. Although its sale is illegal under medicines legislation, it is nevertheless being traded on the illicit market owing to its abuse potential. There is ongoing co-operation between the law enforcement agencies concerned, including An Garda Síochána, Revenue's Customs service and the Health Products Regulatory Authority, HPRA, in tackling this illegal trade, with operations and searches carried out where unauthorised activity in prescription medicines is suspected. All of this work is most welcome and to be applauded, as many of the unregulated products which are the subject of this trade clearly pose potential serious health harm.

Notwithstanding this, it is still clear that we urgently need to strengthen legislation in this area, in particular, to tackle street trading in some of these prescription medicines which, in tandem with the increased prevalence in polydrug use seen in recent times, has become a feature of the drugs landscape. Some of the most prevalent products being sold on the street, for example, the zopiclone products used to treat insomnia, remain solely under the medicinal products regulations rather than the Misuse of Drugs Acts. It is possible for persons selling prescription medicines to be charged under the medicines legislation. However, this legislation is framed as a regulatory measure to govern the legitimate trade in these products rather than as a criminal code. It is clear there are persons who are exploiting this for their own criminal gain.

There are also problems with abuse and the on-street dealing of other medicines already controlled under the misuse of drugs legislation such as benzodiazepines. However, on-street drug dealers often carry relatively small quantities of drugs on their person, which can make it difficult for the authorities to proceed with sale or supply charges. Accordingly, it is proposed to make unauthorised possession of controlled medicines being traded in this way an offence.

Bringing uncontrolled medicines within the scope of the Misuse of Drugs Acts, with applying tighter levels of control governing their supply and that of already controlled medicines, was requested by the Garda. The measures being proposed will certainly help law enforcement authorities in addressing the criminal street trade in these drugs.

While the illicit trade in these substances is not confined to any area, it is clear it has been noticeably prominent in Dublin's north inner city. This problem has been highlighted by community groups and representatives from the local area, as well as by political colleagues, as one of the priority issues to be addressed as part of the Government's overall targeted response to issues of concern affecting Dublin's north inner city. In this respect, the Bill forms part of an overall package of initial measures being introduced by the Government as a priority to strengthen further the hands of law enforcement authorities in tackling those involved in gangland crime and the devastating effects which have been so appallingly seen in the recent violence in the capital city.

Similarly, the introduction of controls for the new psychoactive substances listed under the Bill is also essential. These products have been identified as being of harm and the subject of much public and political concern. A good example in this regard is the synthetic cannabinoid-type substance, known colloquially as clockwork orange, which the Bill will bring within the misuse of drugs legislative framework. Concerns about the availability and use of this substance, particularly in the Cavan-Monaghan region, have been prominently highlighted in recent times. Calls for the control of this substance under the Misuse of Drugs Acts have been made in widespread media reports on this product which was also the subject of much attention and concern expressed at a special joint sitting of the health and justice Oireachtas committees held last July at which the harm associated with the use of this substance and similar products was highlighted. It must be borne in mind that such products are being sold by people who are totally oblivious to the potential threats their use presents. They have already been linked with serious adverse effects, hospitalisations and, sadly in some cases, fatalities in Ireland. Obviously, such an illegal and dangerous trade is totally unacceptable.

To make unauthorised possession of substances an offence, there is a two-step process. The first is to bring under the scope of the Act substances which are not controlled. This will be done by amending the Schedule. The second step is to introduce regulations to tighten the import, export, prescribing and dispensing controls on these substances and on others which are already controlled but not at a high enough level. During the summer months work will continue in my Department in drafting the regulations. We anticipate that there will be a gap of a number of weeks between enactment of the legislation and the finalisation of the associated ministerial regulations and orders required before the controls can be applied.

The Schedule to the Bill will replace parts of the existing Schedule to the Misuse of Drugs Act. It contains substances controlled by means of the emergency legislation passed last year, as well as the substances to be controlled under the Bill. These are prescription medicines, or so-called z-drugs, namely, zopiclone and zaleplon, used in the treatment of insomnia, as well as lisdexamfetamine, an amphetamine-type medicine authorised for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, ADHD. The Schedule also lists two substances found in products selling as clockwork orange, as well as substances which Ireland is required to control as part of our obligations as a member of the European Union and as a party to the United Nations Convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961 and the United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances. These are new psychoactive substances known as 25I-NBOMe, 25C-NBOMe, MT-45, 4,4'-DMAR and benzodiazepine phenazepam. A synthetic cannabinoid known as MDMB-

CHMICA which is under risk assessment at EU level is the final substance on the list to be controlled. Such new psychoactive substances have already been identified as being of harm, including where their use has been implicated in a number of hospitalisations and, in some cases, fatalities in Ireland and elsewhere.

*1 o'clock*

As previously mentioned, listing the substances in the Act is the first part of a two-step process. Regulations are required to regulate the legitimate use of these substances and subject them to the appropriate level of control. Accordingly, the Bill provides for the revocation of the existing regulations. This will enable new regulations to replace them so as to take account of the new substances and regulate their import, export, supply and possession.

The Bill provides for a number of updated definitions of midwives, nurses and practitioners, all of which are consequent on the enactment of the Nurses and Midwives Bill 2011 and the commencement of a new register of nurses and midwives under that legislation. This will ensure references to these persons in the regulations to be made will be up to date.

The Bill provides for the amendment of two sections of the Act to allow for commencement of section 7 of the Irish Medicines (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 which provides for the transfer of responsibility for the issuing of licences under the Act from the Minister for Health to the Health Products Regulatory Authority, HPRA. The proposed amendments will mean that all references in the Act to licences will correctly refer to the authority. While unrelated to the primary purpose of the Bill, it was considered an opportune time to make these amendments so as to finally allow the completion of the transfer of licensing functions from the Minister to the HPRA. While the authority will be responsible for the issue of licences, the Irish Medicines (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 provides that it will comply with any directive or guideline issued by the Minister to it in respect of policy on controlled drugs.

The final provision in the Bill is a standard one to provide for a collective citation and that the Bill and preceding misuse of drugs legislation can be construed as one. Significantly, this provision also allows different sections in the Bill to be commenced at different times, thereby allowing the necessary flexibility to revoke confirmed regulations and orders and update them on a phased basis.

Of course, drug supply measures which is what these provisions represent form only one aspect of our overall response to the complex problem of drug misuse. I want to be clear on this because Senator Lynn Ruane and I discussed the matter in a recent Commencement debate. This is not the Government's response to drug addiction; that is to come in the second misuse of drugs (amendment) Bill which is due in the autumn and the new national drugs strategy led by the Minister of State, Deputy Catherine Byrne, which will be published this year. We must continue to prioritise and resolutely address all aspects of the problem which is so corrosive for our society. In that respect and as I previously stated in the House, the Government intends to deliver on the commitment in the programme for Government to having a health-led rather than a criminal justice approach to drugs use. It includes legislating for injection rooms, as I am happy to confirm again. Accordingly, I intend to publish a second misuse of drugs Bill in the autumn to provide for supervised injecting facilities for chronic drug users. I have heard incorrect commentary that we are moving away from that commitment and I am very pleased to correct the record. I know that this will be welcomed, in particular, by Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin who advocated for these changes during his recent tenure as Minister of State with



responsibility in this area.

A further programme for Government commitment concerns the development of a new national drugs strategy. The strategy is within the remit of my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Catherine Byrne. A wide range of stakeholders in the statutory, community and voluntary sectors have been working hard under an independent chairman to oversee a comprehensive review of the current strategy and develop proposals for the future to address this complex human and social problem. The Minister of State, Deputy Catherine Byrne, will take the rest of this legislation through both Houses of the Oireachtas. We will have an opportunity to hear ideas from Senators and Deputies on this and future Bills.

There is significant debate, both nationally and internationally, on the issue of decriminalisation and-or alternative approaches to the current criminal justice approach to the simple possession of small quantities of illegal drugs for personal use. The issue is also live here as part of the ongoing discussions on the drafting of a new national drugs strategy. The development of the new strategy will include a public consultation phase which will provide an opportunity to have a constructive and wide-ranging public dialogue on our current policies and approaches to the issue. It is expected that the steering group will present its report to the Government towards the end of 2016.

By introducing import and export controls and an offence of unauthorised possession for personal use or the supply of these medicines, it is intended to assist the Garda in dealing with the public on-street dealing in these medicines. The Garda is supportive of the legislation. In introducing it we are also taking the opportunity to control a number of dangerous psychoactive drugs, including clockwork orange and drugs from the N-BOMe family.

The Bill is not about targeting addicts but about disrupting gangs and giving An Garda Síochána the power it needs to do so. I hope all Senators will consider backing the Bill to help to ensure its smooth and speedy passage through the Oireachtas before the summer break. I look forward to the more detailed debate on drugs policy, the national drugs strategy and injecting rooms that will take place in the autumn.

**Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee:** I thank the Minister and the Minister of State for being present in the House for this debate. I particularly thank the Minister, Deputy Simon Harris, for his helpful explanation of the amendments involved.

Having spoken to community activists from many communities blighted by drugs, in particular, activists in the north inner city, we, in Fianna Fáil, feel compelled to support the Bill. There has been a sharp rise in the number of people presenting with addiction problems associated with these drugs and who have overdosed on them. The fact that they can be sold with impunity and yet have the same effect as other illegal drugs such as heroin, cocaine and cannabis has driven this growth.

I am informed by a community activist in the north inner city that Summerhill is now known as “the sleepy mile”, given the prevalence of zopiclone in the area. It is a psychoactive drug with a hypnotic agent often used in the treatment of insomnia. It was linked with 51 deaths due to poisoning in the north inner city in 2013 alone.

The sellers of these prescription drugs arrive in the area at 8 a.m. every day and by the time children are walking to school less than one hour later they are stepping over empty blister packs and witnessing individuals under their influence of these drugs. During the Easter

break one community group of residents in the north inner city ran an anti-bullying programme specifically to stop children from being pressured into being lookouts and couriers for dealers while off school for Easter. Activists have widely voiced their view that the trade in zopiclone is now bigger than that in heroin, cocaine and cannabis.

Clockwork orange is another of the drugs being discussed. It is a head shop drug and a particular problem in counties Cavan and Monaghan where it has been associated with two recent deaths. Despite being banned in Ireland since 2010, it is being sold legally in the North and brought to the South for sale. It is designed to mimic the effects of cannabis. Users of the drug have had problems with delusions, hearing voices and suicidal thoughts.

In January this year a number of students in Cork were hospitalised following a house party. They admitted to taking psychoactive substances which the Bill seeks to make illegal. Clearly, there is a huge concern about these drugs and the effect they are having on individuals and communities. However, we, in Fianna Fáil, are very concerned about the cut in the number of gardaí who are working to prevent and investigate drug crime. Areas in Dublin saw a severe reduction in resources for dedicated drugs squads in recent years. The entire Cavan-Monaghan Garda district has no Garda drugs unit and this is the area which has been particularly affected by clockwork orange, as I mentioned. I appeal to the Minister for Justice and Equality to increase substantially Garda numbers in the dedicated drugs units without delay to ensure the Bill, if passed, is to have any meaning

We also call on the Government to invest substantially in the provision of treatment services for addicts of both drugs and alcohol and to ensure services are available across the country, in both urban and rural communities. We cannot simply make these drugs illegal and expect the problem to go away. Making them illegal is just the first step which needs to happen in conjunction with having properly resourced addiction services, as well as the other essential health, local government and social services. It needs to happen across the country.

Withdrawal symptoms from zopiclone, in particular, are similar to those from heroin and include cramps, nausea and fits, the particular reason many drug treatment centres will not accept users who want to detox as they are not equipped to deal with them. However, detox supervision is necessary, given the risks involved. This often leaves addicts with no safe detox option, which is completely unacceptable.

Last week the Fianna Fáil motion on homelessness was passed unanimously by the House. Contributions made by various Members highlighted the increased poverty levels and the extremely difficult housing problem faced by tens of thousands of people. This reality cannot be divorced from the rise in the level of abuse of prescription drugs. In particular, zopiclone users are primarily homeless. Users have reported that they use the drug to kill the hours of the day and make them forget the reality of their housing problem. In addition, addiction cannot be overcome if housing is overcrowded, inadequate and not permanent. I, therefore, call on the Government to act immediately to resolve the housing crisis and tackle in a meaningful way the problems associated with it such as addiction.

**Senator Colm Burke:** I welcome the Minister of State. I congratulate her on her appointment and wish her every success in her new role.

I welcome the Bill. Earlier, on the Order of Business, I referred to the judgment of the Supreme Court which set aside the judgment of the Court of Appeal. The reason I referred to that

matter was the delegation of powers in bringing forward regulations or statutory instruments to add to existing drugs legislation. The drugs available change by the day. It is important, therefore, that the Minister of State and the Department respond in a timely manner. That is what occurred until the decision of the Court of Appeal which held that Statutory Instrument No. 551 of 2011 was not constitutional and that, therefore, the conviction in a particular case was not in order. The State appealed the decision to the Supreme Court. It was right to appeal it and the judgment issued yesterday clearly set out that the State was correct in its arguments and that we, as legislators, could not legislate for every simple detail of what happened on the street every day but that we could give an overall view of how we could manage our affairs and then delegate the responsibility to the Minister and the Department. That is what the 1977 Act does and the Bill also does it. The Minister is setting out clear guidelines for the management of the drugs sold illegally and making sure the necessary powers are in place for the Garda and other authorities to deal with them.

This demonstrates how the drugs culture changes by the day. A number of months ago a 16 year old in transition year was in my office in Dublin and he advised me that he had worked with a GP in a methadone clinic in the Dublin area. He outlined that the blue light system, used in many public places to prevent people injecting, was null and void. People purchase small sachets of lemon juice to put into the syringe in order that if they do not hit a vein, the lemon juice will react to their tissue, resulting in a sting. They will know whether they are hitting the vein. As a result, the blue lights in toilets no longer have the same effect as they previously had. A 16 year old was able to update me on the issue. It goes to show how the position changes so fast. The importance of this legislation is to make sure we likewise can react quickly and are not relying on legislation to address every detail that needs to be changed. The Minister of State is correct to bring this legislation forward because we need to respond.

A number of colleagues highlighted the slowness of the response to the challenges affecting some areas. This issue is not confined to Dublin. Some people may be under the impression that Dublin is the only place in which this problem is being experienced. However, every place in the State is affected. The availability of drugs and their misuse is an increasing problem which will continue to get worse. We will have to work through a process to make sure adequate resources are available to the Garda and the health services to deal with it.

I welcome the legislation. It is important to support the Minister of State and make sure new regulations are introduced in a fast and efficient manner. Yesterday's Supreme Court decision highlighted the fact that when statutory instruments were laid before the House, we had the right, as legislators, to amend them if we felt they exceeded the powers granted in the legislation. There are, therefore, controls and checks and balances. Sometimes we forget that we have an important power to challenge regulations brought forward by Ministers or Departments and laid before the House. It is important that the legislation should pass at the earliest date and the subsequent regulations and statutory instruments are brought forward in a timely manner in order that the relevant powers are given to the authorities to deal with the illegal trading of drugs and other substances and limits and controls are put in place to make sure the problem does not continue to expand in the way it has in the past two years. I thank the Minister of State for bringing forward the Bill.

**Senator David Norris:** I was interested to hear what the Minister of State's predecessor had to say. I particularly welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Catherine Byrne, because Part 2 of the Bill provides for public consultation on relaxation of the criminalisation of all drugs. This is an important provision which I fully support. It is sad that so many in society feel it nec-

essary to obliterate their consciousness and remove themselves from contact with reality and society. I recall the phrase used in the 1960s: “Tune in, turn on and drop out”. We all thought it was a bit of a laugh, but this is far from a laugh. Almost 30 years ago in the House, I advocated the decriminalisation of drugs. I did so not because I was in favour of pushing drugs and so on, although I have no problem whatsoever with the use of cannabis. It is a recreational drug and I do not see any great problem with it, as it much less harmful than alcohol. However, I was not advocating the taking of drugs but rather looking at the issue simply from an abstract point of view.

Money is driving the drugs epidemic. There is a financial incentive. If it was removed and the impetus that drives people towards selling drugs destroyed, a large part of the problem would be obviated.

Experiments were conducted in England and Holland through which heroin was made available free of charge. One was conducted by a priest and a doctor in Liverpool. They were closed down eventually, even though they had led to a reduction in crime levels of 80%. There has been a huge change in this country since I was a child. I am now aged 72 years, but when I was a child, I never heard of drugs. I would see boozing in the docklands and so on, but there were no drugs. As a resident of the north inner city I am fed up at the way this area of the capital city is treated by the city authorities and the Government. It has been stripped of every decent institution and facility, but drug treatment facilities and so on have been dumped in residential areas. It is absolutely outrageous. The people living in the north inner city are never considered.

Introducing this type of legislation is not a legitimate response. The explanatory memorandum states it is an important element of the Government’s arsenal in the fight against drug dealing and trafficking and consequent gangland crime. There may be a marginal impact, but I have lived there for 40 years and witnessed the area being systematically starved of investment, except on the occasion my late friend and colleague, Tony Gregory, was in the other House campaigning on the issue and secured the Gregory deal. I recall people squealing about the deal and saying, “That is not politics.” What else is it? They were objecting to the fact that some little snotty nosed person from the north inner city was doing the deal. That is what got up their noses, but I rejoiced in that fact. A long-term, not a short-term, solution is needed with massive investment in the north inner city in housing, employment creation and education. That is the only thing that will stop it. When we see a fleet of consultants and surgeons coming from Summerhill and driving around in their sports cars, we will have the proper role models. Third generation unemployed persons have no hope. They look around and see those involved in selling drugs driving their big cars, with their Spanish villas and so on and who, of course, become role models.

Things have moved on in the 30 years or thereabouts since I made the suggestion that we decriminalise. There are now many laboratory-created psychotropic drugs available. They pose the real danger because we do not really know or understand what they do to the brain. That is one reason I was always careful to avoid the subway in New York after 6 p.m. because one never knew if the person sitting opposite had swallowed something that made one look like a six-headed beetle with hammers and saws instead of arms and legs. They would have been perfectly justified in doing someone in.

On the Bill, the regulations will be laid before the House, but I ask the Minister of the State if the House could be alerted to them because often regulations go through on the nod without being discussed. One does not see them at the back of the Order Paper. Will the Minister of

State arrange to have the House alerted when the regulations are placed before it in order that we can have a proper debate on them?

Also, there will be a hiatus between the abolition of the existing regulations and the introduction of new ones. Is the Minister of State concerned about what might happen within that period and will she give an indication of how long that period will be?

I would welcome a debate on decriminalisation and so on, but I refer to the possession of small amounts of drugs for personal use. I gather that, officially, there is a fairly relaxed attitude towards this, but how does it square with the statement at the conclusion of the contribution by the Minister, Deputy Simon Harris, that “by introducing import and export controls and an offence of unauthorised possession for personal use...”? What is that about? I thought we were moving towards a position where unauthorised possession for personal use of small amounts would be tolerated to a certain extent. Perhaps that is because drug pushers carry only small amounts of drugs and go to a third person to obtain big amounts. I seek an assurance that the provision will not be used against what I describe as ordinary civilians who just want to smoke a joint on a Saturday night, something many of us have done.

**Senator Kieran O’Donnell:** I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Catherine Byrne, and wish her well. She has a great personal interest in this issue, to which she brings a wealth of experience.

I have never smoked a joint.

**Senator David Norris:** The Senator should try it. It would brighten him up.

**Senator Kieran O’Donnell:** I thank the Senator. I do not agree with him in saying he does not have a problem with the use of cannabis. I have to say I have a major problem with it. The drug treatment centres tell us that in the past year there has been a huge increase in the numbers of students referred to them for cannabis rather than alcohol use. Cannabis use can lead to a person taking harder drugs. That is what I am hearing as the scientific evidence and as the parent of teenagers, I would not like to see them using cannabis. The Senator was being jocose, but this is a very serious issue. If it is now the norm among students to take cannabis which possibly can lead to the use of harder drugs; it cannot be condoned in any way or allowed to become the norm because it has consequences.

I come from Limerick city which has suffered from gangland crime during the years. The Garda has done tremendous work in dealing with it. It is primarily drugs-related and a problem we have to tackle.

I welcome the legislation, with one caveat. I agree with Senator David Norris on a technical point. We have to make sure the new regulations are in place before the legislation is enacted because if people need to use a drug for legitimate medical reasons, we must ensure a lacuna will not be created whereby, effectively, we will have legislation in place which outlaws its use.

Where people are exploiting the system in creating drugs that are neither legal nor illegal, the legislation and the regulations will fill the void. Furthermore, the Garda can continue to fight crime. We cannot compare people who smoke cannabis at a dinner party for social recreation purposes with those living in poor areas who, in many cases, move on to using heroin. I would not like to see drug use, be it cannabis or some other drug, glamorised, but in some of the comments he made Senator David Norris did this. It is an issue about which I feel very

strongly and one we must treat with great care. If students sitting examinations come to a drug treatment centre as a result of smoking cannabis due to stress and it is affecting their academic achievement, there are other issues that need to be dealt with, but telling people to smoke a joint because it will sort out their problems is not the answer. I have a major problem with this.

There was a flippant attitude to the use of drugs during the economic boom when various commentators spoke about taking cocaine at dinner parties as if it was the norm. It is not. The Minister of State will know from her experience the devastation drugs wreak. There is no glamour in seeing people walk like zombies down a main street not knowing where they are and who are a danger to themselves and others. Drug use is not glamorous. Cannabis use is not glamorous.

I very much welcome this legislation and ask the Minister of State to introduce it speedily. The key element is ensuring she works with her officials to bring forward as quickly as possible the regulations governing legitimate use.

An Garda Síochána, in particular, is at the cutting edge in dealing with this issue. I am aware of the fantastic work being done by Superintendent Dave Sheehan and his colleagues in Limerick, but the fight is continuous. The drug lords are making excessive amounts of money on the backs of very poor and disadvantaged individuals, some of whom end up having very short lives, which is not acceptable.

I commend the Bill to the House and look forward to the Minister of State coming before the House again with the regulations. I wish her well in her brief. People speak about this being a serious debating Chamber. Cannabis use is not good for anyone. I disagree with Senator David Norris on the wider implications of drug use for society and, in particular, individuals.

**Senator Máire Devine:** I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Catherine Byrne, and thank the Minister for Health for his statement.

I am not sure whether Senator Kieran O'Donnell has carried out research on his claim because the research conflicts with his assertions about cannabis. I have dealt with cannabis-induced psychosis, but it has more to do with somebody's premorbid personality. However, that matter has nothing to do with this debate.

**Senator Kieran O'Donnell:** I responded to a comment made by Senator David Norris.

**Senator Máire Devine:** Yes. Perhaps the matter needs a further conversation.

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1977, as amended in 1984 and 2015, and the Criminal Justice (Psychoactive Substances) Act 2010 regulate drug use in the State. They define the penalties for the unlawful production, possession and supply of drugs. Sinn Féin voted to support the legislation in both 2010 and 2015. The party believes the misuse of drugs should be treated as a public health matter; it should not be about the criminalisation of addicts. We favour an holistic and health-based approach to dealing with addiction. Such an approach is effective and needed.

I want to make it crystal clear that my party has many reservations and severe misgivings about the proposed amendment. We believe it should be taken in isolation rather than as part of a suite of measures before us for consideration.

Within the Misuse of Drugs Act substances are scheduled in accordance with the State's obligations under international conventions. Where there is evidence that they cause significant

harm to public health in Ireland, we must act. The list of scheduled substances has been kept under review and action is taken in cases where evidence emerges that substances are being abused and causing significant harm. That is what we are here to debate. As legislators, we must have due regard to any review and action being requested. The purpose of the Government's amendment is to include in the existing legislation prescription drugs, commonly known as benzos or Zs, and certain head shop and designer drugs such as clockwork orange.

Drugs have a devastating impact on communities, families and the unfortunate addicts. As suggested by Fianna Fáil, the drugs mentioned have overtaken heroin in their level of usage. Drug addiction is to be found in every county. Parts of inner city Dublin have been described as an open air supermarket for drugs, with dealers feeding on the pain, needs and wants of addicts which were created by them in the first place. Moms and dads in the inner city of Dublin and my area of Dublin south-central can stand at the gates to their houses and see young children and adults being used as runners by the drug barons who remain hidden from view but make a fortune. Parents are afraid to let their children out of their homes. They are fearful that they will be influenced by what they see on the street. They try to shield their children from this reality, but it is often impossible to achieve. The scourge of drugs is intolerable and unacceptable.

There is an onus on the Government to provide the Garda with powers to tackle the supply of drugs, including the abuse of prescription drugs, and to resource agencies and community groups to tackle drug taking in the community. The Government must also support, not hinder, addicts and users on the road to recovery. When communities get together, civic pride takes over and people realise their place matters. Some of them clean their areas on a seasonal basis. The bags of debris collected contain many empty blister packets that once contained benzos such as diazepam, zimovane and zopiclone. Communities are disheartened by their discoveries. People pick up empty packets and recycle them, but the problem remains. Children may pick up discarded empty packets and think the contents must be special. People are afraid, however, that their children will be attracted to the buzz generated by such drugs. Children are especially at risk of emulating the behaviour of younger adults involved in this trade.

On its own, the Bill will not tackle the scourge of drugs and put the major drug dealers out of business. It is only targeted at a small section of the problem. Proscribing drugs will have no impact, unless it is backed up by resolute action to tackle dealers. Communities must see investment because they have been alienated by successive Governments and the problem has been allowed to fester. The Bill will fail in its aims unless it is matched by additional investment, resources and services.

After careful consideration, Sinn Féin will vote in favour of the Bill on Second Stage to allow it proceed to Committee Stage on which we will table meaningful amendments, as necessary, to strengthen the legislation in line with the vision we set out in a policy document A Better Health Policy for All.

**Senator Lynn Ruane:** I apologise because I am extremely angry at and disheartened by the legislation's short-sighted vision in tackling gangs. The legislation is an attack on addicts and will do nothing to dismantle the drug trade at a high level. If one were to go out onto the streets right now, one would meet people with benzos in their pockets. The Bill deals with the person lying in a doorway, the person living in a hostel and the young man living on an estate. Arresting such persons will not bring down the drug trade, rather the legislation will create a logjam in the prisons and the courts system. It is the weakest link in the chain and simply a reaction to make it look like we are doing something about the problems in the north inner city

and the drug trade.

I will outline what happened to drug services during the years. When a drug was banned and the economy changed, people moved to another. When heroin disappeared, crack cocaine appeared. When the economy improved, the level of cocaine usage increased. The types of drug used keep changing and the available services cannot keep up. We have had a benzo problem for the past 15 years and the services are only just beginning to realise we need extra beds and equip ourselves to deal with benzo fits. Now we are going to try to force benzos further out of the market, but addicts will shift to another drug. It will take another ten or 15 years for us to cop on to what that drug is and how to deal with it through the drug services. Only a handful of beds are available for addicts coming off benzos. There are a couple of beds in Beaumont Hospital, but they have a waiting list that runs to several months. Again, this legislation attacks the addict. Attacking the supply of benzos will lead to addicts suffering from benzo fits that may occur in a hostel or at home if they cannot get a hold of drugs.

Empty blister packs were mentioned. In this city walk people over empty bottles and cans every day. My child would not look at an empty blister pack when walking down a road because it was a piece of litter. Drawing attention to empty blister packs is completely irrelevant in this argument. We should be happy that blister packs are empty and not full because then they would be harmful.

The drug laws have failed completely. Removing drug dealers at a low level simply plays into the hands of drug dealers at a high level. Drug dealers at a low level simply will have drugs taken from them. Do Senators think drug debt will just disappear? The answer is no; next time drug dealers at a low level will have to sell a larger quantity of drugs to make up for the quantity taken off them on the street in order to pay the dealers that the laws will never reach.

I call on Senators to reconsider what they are doing. I urge them to have conversations with the users of the drugs mentioned. Of course, we need to keep them safe and understand what these drugs contain. The legislation will not do this and will drive the problem further underground. I am really upset that we are taking 1 million steps backwards in addressing the problem of addiction. We can keep saying the legislation does not address the problem, that it will be addressed as a health matter, but the legislation is an attack on addicts. It will affect the provision of injecting rooms at some level. Even if people are allowed to have drugs on them within the vicinity of injecting rooms, if gardaí can arrest someone for having zopiclone in his or her pocket, do Senators think they will not use the fact that there is an injecting room in the city to stand feet away from a user in order to make an arrest? If gardaí are seen anywhere near the city centre, users will not avail of injecting rooms. Known drug users will be afraid to use injecting rooms for fear of being arrested for the possession of drugs.

I was hopeful at the beginning that Sinn Féin would support my stance, but it decided not to do so. I will table amendments next week, but today I ask Senators to reconsider their views before trying to push the legislation through. I am really confused why people cannot see that this does not hit the intended target and that it has unintended consequences, of which they are not aware. On the Order of Business I urged that anybody planning to support the Bill take five minutes to come to talk to me to understand its implications, but nobody did, which was disappointing. Between now and next week when the Bill will go through, I ask that I be allowed to bring Senators to talk to the people the amendments will affect. The hostels will gladly open up to Senators. Nine out of ten people are strung out on zopiclone. This will affect them because the next time they buy something and have a small amount in their possession they will be at



risk of being arrested.

That was a complete rant because I am actually angry.

**Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin:** I welcome the Minister of State and wish her well in her endeavours. It is a positive to have a Minister of State with responsibility for the national drugs strategy with the background she has, that she has no other responsibilities and that this issue will be her main focus.

The Bill arises from the High Court case of March 2015. We have, therefore, been waiting for this legislation for over a year. I agree with Senator Lynn Ruane's overall remarks that this legislation flies in the face of what every other western democracy seems to be moving towards - decriminalising the addict and the user and focusing attention on the pusher and those who benefit and profit from the drugs trade. I do not believe having legislation that criminalises someone for possession of an illegal substance does anything for that individual.

In the debate I have heard words such as "zombies". Other words are used in media to describe people with an addiction. A number of months ago two individuals died from a heroin overdose within a couple of hundred yards of each other, one in the toilets of Connolly Station, while the other, a man, was found after being exposed to the open air for a number of nights. They did not make the news. There was no march, petition, public outcry or media interest. At some level collectively, we seem to have decided that addicts are the authors of their own misfortune and, therefore, that their deaths are somehow self-inflicted. If we continue with that narrative, we are destined to repeat the failures of the past. I do not believe it should be a criminal offence for a person to be caught in possession of something to which he or she is addicted. That is a waste of Garda time.

I also do not believe this legislation should separate the issue of injecting centres. In my previous role as Minister of State with responsibility for this area, I felt I had gone a long way down the road towards getting cross-party agreement on the part of the Bill relating to injecting centres. It had been passed by the Cabinet and was due to be included in the Bill. With the best will in the world, I do not understand why it has been separated to be dealt with at a later stage. It does not make any sense. My suspicion is that the responsibility of the Government to react to the High Court case of March 2015 is foremost in the minds of those in the Department, the Minister of State and the Government and that any progressive, forward-thinking way of tackling the drugs issue has to take second place. I am concerned and hope the Minister of State can dampen these concerns and reassure me that the Government will give the same priority to the injecting centre model as it is to this legislation. However, it is very disappointing that the issue has been separated it out.

If we reinforce what we have always done, we will always get what we have always had. People have always taken drugs and it is quite likely that they always will. To demonise and criminalise someone with an addiction problem is, in many respects, to criminalise marginalisation. A disproportionate number of those who engage in drug misuse come from areas of social disadvantage and are people with disabilities, members of the LGBT community, migrants and Travellers. Statistically, it can be proved that the further people are disconnected from the mainstream of Irish society, the more likely they are to be sucked into addiction. When we criminalise the possession of substances for personal use to feed a drug misuse habit and an addiction, we are criminalising marginalisation. That is effectively what we are doing.

I invite the Minister of State to go to the drug court, if she has not done so already. It is a good initiative with limited success. Effectively, what one sees there is a bunch of sick people sitting in a courtroom. Sick people do not belong in a courtroom; they belong in a medical facility. It is pointless in the extreme to continually suggest the solution to the drugs problem in Ireland is a criminal justice one. It is not; it is a health solution. We will eventually come to the conclusion that what has been done in Portugal is a much more humane and potentially successful approach because it puts the needs of the addict at the centre of public policy and does not dehumanise him or her by using words such as “zombie” or terminology that others in the media use openly and without censure, effectively categorising him or her as being little more than junk.

While my party and I are happy to see the Bill progress to Committee Stage, I am disappointed at the separating out of injecting centres. This move feeds my suspicion that the commitment to them is not as strong within the Government as it was in the previous one, notwithstanding the Minister of State’s personal commitment to deal with the issue. I have no difficulty with controlling substances and continuing to control substances that are causing intense harm. However, if we continue to criminalise the possession of substances to which people are addicted, because their bodies are crying out for them, we will continue along the road that has led to so much hurt.

There were 679 drug and alcohol-related deaths in Ireland in 2013. Not all of them were drug-related. Many were traffic related and many were suicides. Everybody in this Chamber should ask why he or she did not hear about the two individuals who had died from a heroin overdose in a toilet in a train station and a few hundred yards away on Foley Street only three months ago. It may be because we continually blame the person who is the victim.

**Senator Colette Kelleher:** I lend my support to the points made by Senators Lynn Ruane and Aodhán Ó Ríordáin in advising the Government against making this move. My credentials in this matter are based on my experience in working for Cork Simon Community for eight years. There is nothing in the measure before us that will help any person with an addiction, including those with whom I would have worked. The new legislation has been driven by criminal justice concerns and An Garda Síochána, not by health issues. As Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin said, people who find themselves in this situation do not need another summons; they need help.

I want to share with the House the story of a young woman, Tara, which is not her real name. She is in her 20s, the same age as my daughter. She is what we call in the clinical world a poly-drug user. In other words, she uses many drugs. I came across her in my time with Cork Simon and we still have a chat and engage in banter. I know her as a person with great spirit and fight. However, she is in serious trouble because of her addiction. Her mother died on the streets in Cork in dreadful circumstances. What she needs and what her mother before her needed is and was not another summons, not a widening of the net to bring her into closer proximity with the criminal justice system but help to deal with her addiction. I fully support Senators Lynn Ruane and Aodhán Ó Ríordáin in saying this is foolish legislation which will not help that person or all of the others who die anonymously in dreadful circumstances and about whom we never hear. I, therefore, advise in our role as Senators against accepting this legislation.

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** I am delighted to be present and it is nice to be in the Chamber. I sat here for a number of weeks during the health sub-committee hearings on the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Bill and the

atmosphere in the Chamber was sombre because we were dealing with people's lives. Today we are doing the same. The former Minister of State with responsibility for the national drugs strategy, Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, made it clear that identifying people who were addicted to drugs, legal or illegal, was something we did on a daily basis in our communities. One such person was, unfortunately, found dead not far from my home recently. I agree with the Senator that those who have been addicted and are tarred because of their condition are looked on like our second cousins in the corner with whom we never want anything to do.

My role as Minister of State with responsibility for the national drugs strategy is to listen to what people have to say. We are in the process of putting a strategy together and there will be public consultation. I ask all those who have contributed to the debate, the many people I have met in communities during the years, to some of whom I have spoken, and Deputies to make sure that when the process is under way, they all fully participate in it because it is about people's lives. It could be our sons, daughters, grandchildren or someone from our extended families who, unfortunately, become trapped in one of the worse scourges facing society. There is no proper legislation in place to address many of the drugs used by young people. The Bill partly addresses that issue and will make sure that in the future drugs will not be allowed to come on to the market and fester. That happened in one part of the country where young people died.

I assure Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin that I have no intention of allowing the clean injecting centre proposal to fall off the table. When I was spokesperson on drugs policy for Fine Gael in opposition, it was one of the ten points I included in the document I put together. It was second on the list, with the first being detox beds, particularly for people aged under 18 years. The proposal is due back for consideration in the autumn and I will do my best to make sure the first pilot clean injecting centre will be in place next year. Last week on Merchants Quay I had a meeting with the residents of St. Audeon's Terrace who on a daily basis encounter discarded needles. I spoke to them about the clean injecting facilities and not one person opposed them, no matter where they would be located. We need to step up to the mark. For too long, addicts have been seen as misfits and people who do not belong to society. Last week in St. Matthew's Church in Ballyfermot and the Church of St. Agnes in Crumlin I celebrated the lives of those who had died, both young and old, from addiction and by suicide. I am always reminded when I attend the celebrations for such persons that the beautiful framed pictures could be of one of my children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews. I am always taken aback by the community's response to people who are less fortunate than ourselves and get up caught in drug and alcohol addiction.

Senator David Norris is correct that we have neglected parts of our society for too long. He hit the nail on the head. Parts of Dublin city and the country have been neglected not because of a lack of funding but because of a lack of infrastructure to deal with people who live, in particular, in social housing and council complexes. I spoke at length when I was Lord Mayor and in the Dáil about councils across the country having a responsibility to look after their tenants. When I visit flat complexes in my area, I see excrement, urine, needles and other paraphernalia discarded on steps. I would not like my family to have to climb 75 steps past all this to the third or fourth floor of a flat complex on a daily basis. Councils across the country, Dublin City Council, in particular, need to step up to the mark. Dublin City Council has allowed complexes in the inner city to become uninhabitable and derelict. People do not want to return to them, even when they are refurbished. Bricks and mortar are not the solution; the problem is much more complex than that.

I am happy that Members have said they will support the Bill, particularly Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee. I agree entirely with her remarks. I come from an area that has been devastated by drugs and have been dealing with the issue since I was a voluntary youth worker locally in the early 1970s. One of the problems with addiction is that addicts who have entered their 30s or 40s could be wiped off the list because they have gone so far that it will be difficult to bring them back. We need to focus on young people in these communities from the day they are born and bring them through a process with their families and communities that emphasises that education is the sole way to make sure they have a life ahead of them. I am very much in favour of using the national drugs strategy to deal with the under 18s who are addicted. They find it difficult to enter a detoxification programme. That is the key to helping young people.

Senator David Norris said money fuelled the drug culture in our society, but greed is also a factor. When young people see somebody down the road who does not have a job and left school early driving around in a BMW, they see it as the easy option and that is for what they go. It is a sad option and we need to stop it.

I do not want to criminalise anybody who takes drugs because of an addiction, but decriminalisation is a complex issue which has to be worked out properly before we can say people should not be criminalised for carrying drugs in their pockets. When I reflect on the pictures of all the young people in the church in Ballyfermot the other night - brothers, sisters, cousins, nieces and nephews - we were remembering relatives whose lives had been torn apart because somewhere along the way somebody had handed them a pill from his or her pocket. No decision has been made on decriminalisation, but we need to examine this issue in great depth in conjunction with the Department of Justice and Equality. If we were to decriminalise addicts, we need to consider how it would affect others. The issue is being looked at and I would not like Members to think otherwise.

Senator Máire Devine mentioned children being used as mules and gophers. Three weeks ago I received a call from a woman who told me that the day her child had made her First Holy Communion, she was asked to bring a package of drugs across the road. That was the day the child was standing in her First Holy Communion dress outside a church. That is a reflection on the lengths to which the people concerned will go. They do not care who they use or how young or old they are.

A number of Members raised the issue of what would happen until the legislation was enacted. We will stay with the regulations until the Bill is enacted; therefore, there will not be a gap.

*2 o'clock*

I am delighted to thank all those who contributed to the debate. I wish to conclude the debate on Second Stage with a few remarks on the importance of the Bill and to assure Senators of my commitment and that of the Government to addressing the problems associated with drug use. Let us remember what the misuse of drugs legislation is all about, namely, preventing the misuse of dangerous substances. The Bill aims to minimise the risks by regulating the possession, supply, manufacture, import and export of these substances. No one would argue with these aims. Every drug user is a human being with a family, neighbours and a community. Drug users are schoolchildren, students, mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles. They may be in paid employment, unemployed, living at home, homeless or rich, although the majority are poor. Some misuse drugs that have a legitimate use, while others use drugs that have no legitimate use. Some drug users are what we might term recreational drug users, whereas oth-

ers have become trapped in their drug habit. That is an important point. It is as if they are in a tumble dryer with no way out of their addiction unless proper services are available to help them. What they have in common is drug use that impacts to some degree or other on their lives and that may negatively affect their relationships with their families, friends and neighbours and the wider community and society.

The proposed amendments to the Misuse of Drugs Act and the regulations to be made subsequently will introduce controls on substances that are open to abuse and being traded openly and unlawfully. The aim of the Bill is to assist the law enforcement authorities in dealing with the scourge of the unlawful availability of substances that are harmful to health. As the Minister stated, policy will be led by concerns about people's health, not criminalising them. No one could argue with these points.

Undoubtedly, problem drug use continues to be one of the most significant challenges facing the country. I am aware of the trust placed in me by the Government to lead in addressing these challenges, but it is not all down to me. It is for all Members in this Chamber, as human beings living in communities, to ensure young children are protected against those who have no sense of age or difference when leading others down the road to drug addiction. It is a challenge for everyone. Directly or indirectly, every community is affected by drug abuse and addiction. All communities deserve our protection through the control of the unlawful supply of dangerous substances and through access to treatment and other services, when needed. I have spoken to some Members of the Oireachtas about the availability of access to services. Services in my community do their best to do a good job, although many could do much better. There are, however, too many services. We must consider what services are being supplied to addicts and their families and ensure quality rather than quantity marks our approach. We must have quality services in communities instead of services being splintered everywhere. Addicts and families in trouble should not be running to ten services. This matter will form part of the national drugs strategy, into which we will all have an input.

I would like to address some of the many Senators who come from areas outside Dublin. As the House knows, I am from Dublin, but this issue affects people everywhere, not just those living in Dublin. It affects people living in counties Cork, Mayo, Donegal and Letterkenny. I receive calls and e-mails from people in every town and village who claim that they do not have access to services and ask what they should do when they find their children starting to take recreational drugs. We need to expand a service into communities and draw people together, regardless of how small or large those communities are. This is in line with the commitment in the programme for Government to provide for a health-led rather than a criminal justice approach to drug use.

The emphasis on health-led policy is not new. The national drugs strategy 2009-2016 aims to tackle the harm caused to individuals and society by the misuse of drugs through a concerted focus on the five pillars of supply reduction, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research. The strategy aims to encourage problem substance users to engage with and avail of such services. Treatment is provided through a network of statutory and non-statutory agencies using a four-tier model of service delivery. The model is based on the principle that drug treatment is best provided at the level of complexity which matches the patient's need and as close to the patient's home as possible. It is all about tackling the problem within the community. Under the strategy, the HSE has reoriented addiction services in order that they are capable of dealing with all substances. This recognises that polydrug use is endemic among people attending drug treatment and makes treatment even more complex.

The provision of harm reduction measures such as needle and syringe programmes and methadone maintenance treatment reduces drug-related harm and facilitates recovery by providing a pathway into services. Our focus is on moving people towards drug-free lives, where achievable. I have listened to statistics during the years for the numbers on methadone. People in my life and community talk on a daily basis about how they will work on taking methadone. Some have been on it for eight or ten years. I do not accept this. It is wrong. They should have been moved on a long time ago. That approach must form part of our considerations on the drugs strategy. Addiction is not a choice; it is a health care issue. That is why it is imperative that we approach the drug problem in a more compassionate and sensitive way.

I have attended the funerals of young people whom I knew closely and who died because of addiction. Some came from good families where there were no problems but, for some reason or another, found themselves getting sucked into the tragic belief that if they only took a small amount of drugs, they would not become addicts and move on to heroin and other lethal substances. I am sure Senators can reflect on the many funerals they have attended because of suicides or drug addiction. Most striking is how the families have become lost in anger at themselves at not being able to do anything about what happened. After I speak to them, I often leave believing that, besides the child who has passed away, we must help the families. They are lost in a black hole when their loved ones are taken away and do not have the answers. Many people who committed suicide did not even leave a note explaining why they did it; therefore, their families do not know why it happened. The funerals are of young people, some as young as 12 or 13 years of age, whose lives were only beginning. As a public representative and a citizen of this country, I have an obligation to do my best to help young people.

The programme for Government contains a commitment to legislate for supervised drug injecting facilities. It is my intention to publish a Bill in the autumn to deal with this issue.

This move is in line with the findings made in a recent report from the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction which found that supervised drug consumption facilities could be an effective intervention in seeking harm reduction and as a means to encourage drug users to enter treatment programmes. That is what we all want. Many Senators will be familiar with the Merchants Quay Ireland facility which is in my constituency. I might as well be honest - it is the best facility of its type in Ireland. It deals on a daily basis with people with whom others in society are not prepared to deal. Those who go to Merchants Quay Ireland are not just looking to avail of its needle exchange service; they also want to be able to enter a programme. Many of those who use the Merchants Quay Ireland facility are brought into a programme and helped. That is what safe injecting facilities should be about. I have to inform Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin that I have not visited one of these facilities. I have been asked to visit them, but my big problem is that I would have to travel to do so and I am afraid of my life of flying. However, I intend to visit one of them because I believe they work. This point has been made clearly by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and we need to look at it. I guarantee the House that I will do my utmost in that regard. The facilities in question have been shown to be effective in engaging populations of drug users who are difficult to reach. This is especially the case for marginalised groups such as the homeless and those who use drugs on the streets or in other risky and unhygienic conditions.

I am nearly finished. I apologise for moving away from the Bill.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** No. The Minister of State can finish.

23 June 2016

**Deputy Catherine Byrne:** A key commitment in the programme for Government concerns the development of a new national drugs strategy which will take effect from January 2017 when the current strategy expires. The steering committee that has been established to oversee the process is representative of key stakeholders. It will provide guidance and advice for me on how the new strategy should address the problem of drug use, the structures through which this might be done and the incorporation of key performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of the new policy. It is important for people to contribute to the open public consultation programme. It is envisaged that a health-led approach to drug use will be among the range of issues to be considered by the steering committee in the course of developing the new strategy. This will help to ensure people with drug problems are put at the centre of national drugs policy. This, in turn, will assist them in leading the lives they want to live and which they aspire to live in their communities.

Many of us who know people who are addicted to drugs are aware that such persons often become outcasts in their communities. Their communities do not want to know them, even though they are sleeping on streets and in gardens at night. If we are to give any hope to younger people, in particular, who find themselves caught in the trap of addiction, we must change the attitudes that cause them to become outcasts in many communities. I emphasise that they can come back out of this dark hole. In many cases, they return to their communities and have children of their own. Last week I attended an awards ceremony in Ringsend for people who had gone through addiction and availed of addiction services. A young man in his early 30s spoke about his experiences as someone who had been an out and out addict. There is no other way to describe it. He had been on the ground. He said he was ashamed of the things he had done in his life and would not have got to where he was if services had not been provided to help him back out of the hole in which he had found himself. I do not think there was a dry eye in the house when he had finished his passionate speech to the approximately 200 people who were in the room. He then introduced us to his 11 day old child, whom he had brought along to show us how much his life had changed. I mention this to show that there is hope for drug users.

I am keen to ensure there will be a broad, comprehensive and inclusive consultation process that will provide opportunities to engage in public participation, particularly in communities affected by the drug problem. It is intended to launch the public consultation process by the end of July. In line with the commitment in the programme for Government, it is expected that the steering committee will be in a position to submit its final report to me for consideration at the oversight forum on drugs in December. I hope to receive the report in early December; I do not want to receive it on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. I reiterate my commitment as a citizen, public representative and Minister of State with responsibility for the national drugs strategy and that of the Government to address in a balanced and effective way the challenges posed by drug misuse to individuals and their families, neighbours, friends and, above all, communities.

I thank everybody who contributed to the debate. I think I will be back for a few hours next week. If Senators want to propose amendments, I will be more than happy to address them.

Question put and agreed to.

Committee Stage ordered for Tuesday, 28 June 2016.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** When is it proposed to sit again?

**Senator Colm Burke:** At 2.30 p.m. next Tuesday.

*Seanad Éireann*

The Seanad adjourned at 2.15 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 28 June 2016.