



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

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

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SEANAD ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 29 Eanáir 2019

Tuesday, 29 January 2019

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach i gceannas ar 12 p.m.

*Machnamh agus Paidir.
Reflection and Prayer.*

An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Order of Business is No. 1, motion re Special Joint Committee on Climate Action, to be taken without debate at the conclusion of the Order of Business; No. 2, address to Seanad Éireann by an t-Uachtarán, Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, Mr. John Horan, to be taken at 1.30 p.m. and conclude not later than 3.30 p.m.; No. 3, statements on local government: directly elected mayors, to be taken at 4 p.m. and adjourned at 6 p.m., with the time allocated to group spokespersons not to exceed ten minutes each and all other Senators not to exceed six minutes each; and No. 4, Judicial Appointments Commission Bill 2017 - Committee Stage (resumed), to be taken at 6 p.m. and adjourned at 9 p.m., if not previously concluded.

Senator Catherine Ardagh: I extend my sympathy and that of the Fianna Fáil group to the families who have lost loved ones on the roads in the past week. They include the families of Shaun Harkin, Mícheal Roarty and John Harley and of Jackie Griffin in Dublin. Our thoughts and prayers are with them at this time. The death toll on the roads is heartbreaking.

Dublin 8 is saturated with student accommodation. In the immediate area there are over 1,000 student accommodation units. Within 1 km there are over 3,000 units. Incredibly, some of these units cost up to €350 a week to rent. Show me a student who has that amount of money to put aside each week to pay for housing.

The real impact of the availability of student accommodation in these urban areas with great communities is that, by its nature, the population living there is transient, which means that those living in student accommodation do not get an opportunity to convene and get involved with the community, not because they are bad people but because of the short period they spend in student accommodation. This deteriorates and eats into the community fabric and takes away from the communities living there.

From a practical perspective, many of the student apartments do not come with parking spaces and we all know that many students have cars. This adds to the congestion. Dublin 8 has sufficient student accommodation. We need to consider the planning laws to ensure parking

spaces will be supplied which will make it much more expensive for builders to build. It is a lot cheaper to build when they do not have to dig down. This is one of the reasons we are seeing many such units being built. I would like to see incentives given by the Government to encourage the provision of long-tenure housing in Dublin 8 because the area is over-saturated with and has enough student accommodation. We need to consider long-term housing solutions.

The third issue I wish to raise, and which I believe many Members will mention, is the impending nurses' strike. There may be as many as 40,000 nurses who are planning to go on strike tomorrow. We all implore public service management and the unions to get involved. I encourage the Minister for Health to also get involved as many patients will be affected. Public health nurses provide a service for cancer patients. Many are due to start treatment this week or are perhaps in the middle of treatment. It is important, therefore, that the regimes be stuck to. I know that emergency and essential care services will be provided, for which I thank the nurses. We can only imagine how upset and worried patients are going to be in the next few days. I implore the Minister to get a handle on this issue and ensure the strike does not go ahead.

Senator Victor Boyhan: I thank the Leader for organising a debate and statements on directly elected mayors. It was requested and he arranged it. I also thank the Minister for facilitating the debate and everyone else involved. It will be an interesting debate and there will be some interesting contributions. I am conscious that we are dealing with the Order of Business. I appeal to the Leader to again consider an idea to which he was agreeable in principle before Christmas. I refer to the Order of Business the Leader reads out and that the Cathaoirleach and the Clerk of the Seanad have in front of them. Can we have copies of it circulated or put on the back table?

I ask because we have three functions. We accept, reject or amend the Order of Business. That has been made very clear to us in the communications we have received since we came back to the House after Christmas. I want to focus on that issue. I am asking the Leader about this matter for the third time. He agreed to my suggestion in principle before. I checked with the Dáil today and the Members of that House get the Order of Business on a Tuesday. As I have a copy with me, I know that is happening in the other House. Can we have something similar here?

I want to talk briefly about the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill 2017. I am the leader of the Seanad Independent Group. The Leader will be aware that we meet on a Wednesday with the leaders and the Whips. This is a draft Order of Business. The Leader and his team do a very good job, as I acknowledge. I also know that there are always difficulties in balancing the availability of Ministers and various other people and that it is a complex process to bring it all together. Nowhere in the draft, however, when we left, was there any suggestion or hint that the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill 2017 would be on the schedule this week. I find that disappointing. It is not helpful if we are to plan our work and work in a spirit of co-operation in managing the order of our business.

I also ask the Leader if he will agree to organise a debate on forestry. We received correspondence from IBEC yesterday stating it had established a forestry group within the organisation. It recognises the importance of the timber and forestry industry in respect of sustainable rural communities, future employment, the economy and greater reliance on timber in the housing construction industry. There has, however, to be a balance in all of that, with sustainable and mixed forests, mixed vegetation, mixed tree lands and, tying in with that, the amenity aspect of forests across the country. I welcome IBEC's policy document that was circulated yesterday.

It is positive and good. I ask the Leader if we can have statements on forestry in the House at some stage that might be suitable for the Minister with responsibility for forestry.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: Ba mhaith liom comhbhrón a dhéanamh le muintir Dhún na nGall, Ghaoth Dobhair agus an Fháil Charraig ar a tharla oíche Dhomhnaigh. I pass on my sincerest condolences and those of Sinn Féin's to the families and friends of the four young men who were tragically killed near Magheroarty on Sunday night. They were Shaun Harkin, Mícheal Roarty, John Harley and Daniel Scott. May they rest in peace. The sudden loss of so many young lives has impacted on many people, young and old. As someone who lives in Erris in a Gaeltacht area, I am only too aware of the devastating impact such tragedies have on a tight-knit community.

I raise the issue of VAT increases that will be applied to food supplements from March. There has been little or no consultation with the affected retailers. Although Revenue has stated all products with 0% VAT are undergoing review, the increase has come as a bolt out of the blue. Last week at the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach the chairman of the Revenue Commissioners referred to an expert report which had been commissioned on the matter. The report should be published and an increase in VAT suspended until there is clarity in the decision-making process. The issue should also be covered in the tax strategy papers later this year. It now appears that the VAT charge on these products will be more than that levied on fast food. I have been lobbied by an awful lot of groups on this issue. Many of the people who take these supplements are over the age of 55 years; therefore, the increase will have a greater impact on them. Increasing the cost of supplements and things that are essential to their good health at such a rate will put them in further financial hardship. I ask that the VAT rate be suspended until after the matter has been examined properly.

Senator Colm Burke: I, too, convey my sympathy, the sympathy of the Fine Gael Party and the sympathy of the House to the families who have suffered loss as a result of the tragedy in County Donegal. It is very difficult on everyone in the local community and a huge loss of so many young lives in one event. It is a really tragic accident that occurred. Our thoughts are with each and every one of the families and their immediate friends and relations at this time.

I wish to talk about statistics as the housing statistics for 2018 have just been released. They indicate that there has been a substantial increase in the number of new builds in the past 12 months. There is an annual increase in output of over 31%. This is the highest number of houses built since 2009. The corner has been turned in building new houses, which is welcome at a time when many people are in need of houses and anxious to acquire their own homes. Another interesting fact is that more than 6,272 houses were completed in the last quarter of 2018, a 37% increase year on year. If that trend continues and I hope it will, more than 25,000 new houses will be built in 2019. Likewise, substantial progress has been made with local authority builds. Again, it is thanks to all of the local authorities and their members for making sure targets are set and achieved.

However, we must still consider long-term planning for the people who are caught in a situation where it will be difficult for them to borrow on their income, yet they do not qualify for a place on a local authority housing list. As I have mentioned time and again, there is a need for long-term planning in the rental accommodation market. If I lease a commercial premises I will get a 20 year lease, a five-year rent review and be responsible for internal repairs and maintenance. We should consider and develop the rental market in the same way as has been done throughout Europe. We need a mindset change on this issue because people move around

much more with their jobs and the expectation of remaining in the one place for 20, 30 or 40 years has changed substantially. We need to discuss the issue here and I hope it will be on the agenda the next time that the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government is in the House to deal with housing matters.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: I, too, extend my deepest sympathy and prayers to the families of the four young men who tragically lost their lives in Machaire Rabhartaigh, County Donegal over the weekend. A cloud of sadness and desolation now hangs over that beautiful part of County Donegal. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families. I also extend my deepest sympathy and prayers to the Waller family who lost their father and mother in a tragic accident that took place in County Monaghan at the weekend also. I extend my sympathy to all families who have lost loved ones in road traffic accidents.

I am also saddened to learn of the nursing strike planned for tomorrow. It is very disappointing that the Minister for Health and the Government have allowed the situation to develop to such an extent that nurses feel they have no other option but to go on strike. As matters stand, we must recognise and acknowledge a number of issues. First, nurses and midwives have the lowest salary of graduate professionals in the health service. The Government must acknowledge this. It must also acknowledge that there is a serious issue with recruitment and retention in the nursing profession. The Government must realise and appreciate that the nursing profession is changing and has changed dramatically in the past few years. It is sad nurses feel they have no other option at this point but to take strike action and all that goes with it. I was interested to see a comment yesterday in one of the national newspapers by Mr. Peter O'Rourke, an orthopaedic surgeon based in Letterkenny University Hospital. He said nurses had been "poorly treated and poorly paid for many years and the only surprise is that they have waited so long to take industrial action." This is from a gentleman who works shoulder to shoulder with members of the nursing profession seven days a week, 52 weeks of the year. We all appreciate the daily hard work and dedication of nursing staff. Sometimes when their shifts finish they must stay on for another 45 minutes or longer to brief the staff who are taking over from them, all without pay. We must recognise this. We must acknowledge that there is a problem and enter into meaningful negotiations with the nurses to try to resolve this matter for the benefit of nurses and us all.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: I propose an amendment to the Order of Business - one of my colleagues on the Independent benches will second the proposal - that No. 22, Public Sector (Plain Language) Bill 2019 - First Stage, introduced by the Labour Party with the support of the National Adult Literacy Agency, NALA, be taken before No. 1.

To add briefly to what has been said, people should realise nobody takes industrial action lightly. Whatever opinion people might have about the pay claim, those who suggest nurses or anybody else would go out on strike on a whim need to realise withdrawing one's labour is probably the most serious action a worker will ever take. No worker takes it lightly. That should be respected. My view and that of my Labour Party colleagues is that we support the action that will be taken by the nurses tomorrow. People should realise that when industrial action reaches strike action something has gone seriously wrong. I hope they will appreciate that when making comments about the action being taken tomorrow.

Senator Gerry Horkan: Although my party leader has already extended sympathy, I extend my personal sympathy on the tragic deaths of the four young men in County Donegal. Road deaths of such magnitude would be devastating for any community but even more so for

such a small community. Equally, I extend my sympathy to the families of all the people killed on the roads. We have had a very sad week as there have been ten or 11 deaths on the roads since last Thursday. Last year was a fantastic year with the lowest number of road deaths on record, but we can never take our eye off the ball and must do everything we can. I am not proposing a discussion on road safety but we must keep our eye on the ball in that regard. I extend my sympathy to all the families involved.

I wish to clarify Senator Boyhan's point about the meeting we had last week. He said there was no hint that the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill 2017 would be taken this week. In fact, when the question was asked about when we would discuss the Bill again we were told it that would be during the sitting week beginning on 5 February. It was confirmed to us that we would be discussing it next week, not this week. That is my recollection of what happened at the meeting.

However, I wish to speak about something else today. We are discussing the Order of Business and I can only speak about future Orders of Business today because there is no other time to do it. I would like the Leader to schedule a debate on what I consider to be a very important matter, namely, the value of the EU to the Irish economy and that of the EU as a whole. While Ireland ranks second to Luxembourg in the league table, with between 88% to 92% of Irish people in favour of the EU, it is important to have a debate on the values of the EU and that we acknowledge the significant benefits we enjoy, such as freedom of movement across the 28 countries, the Erasmus programme that facilitates young people to study abroad, as well as the benefits to agriculture, trade and the Single Market. Much of our legislation on equality, justice, women's rights and environment is a benefit of the EU, as is the European health insurance card, the former E111 form. While I am not entirely happy with every single thing the EU does in terms of the CCCTB, digital taxation or the eurozone crisis, it is important to schedule a debate on the future of the European Union and the value of the EU to Ireland in order that people who are contemplating any other position which I do not anticipate can articulate their opinions. Perhaps if there had been a debate in Britain a long time ago about the value of the EU, we would not now be facing Brexit.

Senator Michael McDowell: I too want to be associated with the statements of sympathy to the relatives and friends and community members of those who died in that tragic accident in County Donegal. When I heard that there were four young men who had been killed in a car accident and that the word "Donegal" came after it, it brought me back to a number of previous occasions. I know that this is not the day on which to discuss these things but I really think road safety, particularly in the north west, has to be looked at again. Road safety is a serious problem in that area and has been for many years.

I agree completely with Senator Boyhan that it is desirable that we should have the proposed Order of Business in written form available to us at the commencement of each session of the House.

Following on from Senator Horkan's statement about the need to debate the future of Europe, this is a very important day in the sense that the House of Commons in London is setting out to debate a series of amendments to a Government motion, the gist of which may well affect the future of this island and the future relations between this island and our neighbouring island. There are two things that strike me about the Brexit debate. First, it has been stated repeatedly by a certain group of people, the European Research Group, ERG, people in the Tory Party in the House of Commons, that the constitutional position of Northern Ireland cannot be

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prejudiced in any way by something like a backstop agreement. The constitutional position of Northern Ireland, however, both in the Constitution of this state and the United Kingdom, is now governed by the Good Friday Agreement, an international treaty registered with the United Nations and co-guaranteed by a number of institutions. To say that somehow the Constitution is threatened by measures that are necessary to sustain the constitutional existence of the Good Friday Agreement is, in fact, to misrepresent the situation.

Second, it is important to say the backstop is necessary for precisely this reason, namely, that were there no backstop, it would be possible for the same group of people - the ERG-oriented people in the Tory Party - to urge their Government to effectively take hostage the economic future of this state and Northern Ireland in further negotiations on trade deals with Europe. It was for that purpose that the backstop was inserted as a preliminary step to ensure such a process would not happen. In case people think that is unduly alarmist, we know from remarks made by Mr. Rees-Mogg and others that there are members of the Tory Party who are prepared to put a gun to the head of this state economically to push through their points of view. That should be said.

In view of the importance of the future of Europe as a topic, I propose an amendment to the Order of Business that instead of having a further debate on Committee Stage of the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill 2017 this evening, we devote the time provided for it to debate the future of Europe, as suggested by Senator Horkan.

An Cathaoirleach: Before the Senator resumes his seat, he indicated that he wished to second Senator Ó Ríordáin's amendment.

Senator Michael McDowell: I second the amendment.

Senator Billy Lawless: I second Senator McDowell's amendment.

An Cathaoirleach: Are there other speakers?

Senator Máire Devine: Yes.

An Cathaoirleach: Speak now or forever stay silent.

Senator Máire Devine: I will speak now. I want to refer to the nurses' strike which will take place tomorrow.

Senator Gerry Horkan: We have discussed that matter.

Senator Máire Devine: Having been a nurse, I want to have my say and express my view that this House should support nurses, given the recruitment and retention issues about which we have spoken for so long and the crisis in the health service. I extend my best wishes to the nurses who are about to commence their first 24-hour strike.

An Cathaoirleach: Finally, I call Senator Lombard.

Senator Tim Lombard: I thought the Cathaoirleach had forgotten me and that it was a Corkonian thing.

An Cathaoirleach: It is an east versus west thing.

Senator Tim Lombard: I would like to comment on the legislation passed by the Houses

last week on the new arrangements for local government in the city and county of Cork. The Act has been signed into law. On 4 June 2019 the boundaries of Cork City Council will be extended to cover a major portion of the county's population, perhaps as many as 80,000 people. The city council will assume responsibility for a large area around the city, including Ballincollig, Blarney, Grange, Frankfield and Rochestown. The debate on the legislation has been had. We must now move on to ensuring Cork county can develop and flourish. Many of the county's major regional towns such as Clonakilty, Bandon, Kinsale, Macroom and Mallow are dependent on agriculture and rural enterprise. There has to be a new focus on how Cork County Council is run and funded through the national Exchequer. That refocusing has to take account of the major rate base that has been taken from the county council. Cork Airport business park, EMC in Ballincollig and other employers have been brought under the city's jurisdiction. We need to put a fund in place to ensure the county can flourish and develop.

As the Cathaoirleach is very much aware, towns in County Cork are, unfortunately, under pressure, as are all rural towns in many ways. They were used to having the cushion of a fund comprising rates paid by businesses around the city. That is now gone. An economic development fund needs to be put in place to ensure these towns, particularly their town centres, can develop. We have seen many shops close in many of these rural towns in the past six weeks. It is a very tough time of the year for business. We need a new focus on how we will redevelop these towns.

I propose that the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Deputy Ring, come to this Chamber to discuss his plan for re-energising and redeveloping towns. He should take into consideration the real structural changes that have happened in County Cork. If we do that, we can drive economic development to ensure these towns develop. I will be seriously concerned if we do not put a plan in place because without the rates base previously available to the county council, these towns will, unfortunately, not develop as they should.

An Cathaoirleach: That concludes the Order of Business. I am sorry; I call the Leader to respond.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I was hoping the Cathaoirleach might give me a leath lá.

On my own behalf and that of the Government, I extend deepest sympathy to the families of Mícheal Roarty, Shaun Harkin, Daniel Scott and John Harley who were tragically killed at the weekend in County Donegal, as well as the family of Jackie Griffin who was killed on the M50. The very worthwhile request by Senator McDowell for a debate on road traffic and road safety comes following a weekend marked by further tragic and traumatic loss of life in County Donegal. As Senator McDowell rightly stated, it sends a shiver down one's spine to again hear of four young men being killed in a car accident.

The fatal crash on the M50 highlights the need for our society to come to a proper understanding of the usage of social media and mobile technology. This House has a responsibility to legislate in that regard, but there is also an obligation on social media companies to think of the victims of tragedies and their families. The Garda addressed the issue of certain social media posts after the crash on the M50 at the weekend. The actions of some in that regard were irresponsible and, of course, illegal. It is important to recognise that bereaved families are today grieving the death of a loved one. I hope the House can send a message to all those working in road safety that we need to be more proactive. There was a 40% drop in the number of fatalities in 2018 to the lowest level since records began in 1959. However, we must not become

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complacent. Significantly, there was a 32% increase in the number of pedestrians killed on the roads, of whom a substantial portion are men aged 55 years or over. We have a lot of work to do. The request of Senator McDowell for the Minister to come to the House should be fulfilled as a matter of urgency.

I welcome to the Visitors Gallery Mr. Seán Moran, a very good friend of mine who has brought Gaelic games to the homes of many thousands of Irish people. He is an eminent journalist and it is great to have him in the Visitors Gallery for the Order of Business. I thank him for the great work he does in bringing Gaelic games to so many people on a daily basis.

Several Senators made reference to the issue of the nurses' strike which is-----

Senator Máire Devine: Yes.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Senator Devine should know that it is not a matter for cheering.

An Cathaoirleach: The Leader should not be interrupted. I do not think the Senator was cheering.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: It is not a matter for cheering.

Senator Máire Devine: I do not know about that.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Devine was taking a deep breath.

Senator Máire Devine: I thank the Cathaoirleach.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The matter was raised by Senators Ardagh, Gallagher, Ó Ríordáin and Devine. I do not know to whom Senator Ó Ríordáin was referring in belittling the strike.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: I was not referring to a Member of this Chamber.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: All Members know that it is the prerogative of a union to go on strike. It is important to recognise that we have a public sector pay deal and that there have been significant changes to the pay scales and salaries of public sector workers. At this late stage, I hope the Labour Court will engage in further discussion with all sides. All Members recognise the importance of nurses and the value they bring to the health system. No Senator should claim a monopoly of such knowledge. We all live in our communities and know men and women who are nurses. We have all been in hospitals - some of us have worked in them - and recognise their importance. It is important that dialogue continue. The HSE will announce contingency plans later this afternoon. Some appointments scheduled for tomorrow have been cancelled. It is important that all mechanisms be used to avoid and avert industrial action. I hope the required conversations will take place in the coming 24 hours to ensure we do not have a nurses' strike tomorrow.

Senator Ardagh raised the issue of student accommodation in Dublin 8. We will have the Minister in the House tomorrow for a debate on housing, but I will be happy to have the debate sought in due course.

I will consider further the request made by Senator Boyhan. As far as I am aware, it is not the third but the second time he has asked me.

On the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill, let us be very clear, as those who attend the

meeting of group leaders on a Wednesday will recognise, I always act in good faith. As Leader of the House, it is my prerogative, on behalf of the Government, to bring forward business to be dealt with in the House. It does change occasionally. I give a caveat to Members today in order that they will not be in any doubt that schedules have changed, not just in my time as Leader but in all Seanaid. I checked the position. It is extraordinary that the only item of legislation on the Order Paper that has not been agreed to at the group leaders' meeting is the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill. Every other item of legislation not on the agenda for the Wednesday meeting has been agreed to on the Order of Business. It is, however, my prerogative as Leader to make a decision. Senator Boyhan knows that I am not trying to drive a stagecoach over the schedule and that I try to consult insofar as it is possible to do so. He requested to have the Bethany home issue discussed next week. Today we will also have statements on directly elected mayors. Therefore, I try to accommodate Members insofar as I can. The important point is that, as Members of the Seanad, we have a job of work to do in passing legislation. We have spent an inordinate amount of time dealing with Committee Stage of the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill. I understand there are very sincere views held by some Members and that other Members are engaged in a game of filibustering, but to be fair, they do not include Senator McDowell, although he may be part of it. The behaviour of some Members has been less than helpful in doing our job as parliamentarians. I fully accept the bona fides of Senator McDowell and I am not questioning him before he comes back and accuses me of doing so. I will not accept the amendment proposed to the Order of Business with regard to the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill. For the information of Senators McDowell and Boyhan, to the best of my knowledge, the Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, will not be available tonight, but this must be confirmed. The Minister of State is in Cork today on business at University College Cork.

I will be very happy to have the debate requested by Senator Horkan on the future of Europe. We had a very good debate last week-----

Senator Gerry Horkan: It would actually be on the benefits of membership of the European Union.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I will come back to that matter. Last week we had a very good debate on Brexit. The Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, was in the House previously to discuss the future of Europe. I will be very happy to have a debate on the benefits of membership and the importance of the European Union to Ireland post-Brexit, but, first, to be fair, we have not given the Minister of State due notice of the request. Second, having a debate on the future of the Europe and the benefits of membership of the European Union in opposition to the debate on the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill would be unfair in the context of the request made by Senator Horkan. I will, however, be happy to accede to and accommodate his request in due course.

To respond to Senator Boyhan's comments on forestry, I will be very happy to have the Minister of State, Deputy Doyle, come to the House to discuss the matter. The Senator is correct that it is a very important industry. Last week wonderful plans were unfurled and unveiled on the future of the industry. I will be happy to have the debate sought in the coming weeks.

Senator Conway-Walsh referred to VAT on food supplements. I am aware that she raised the issue at the finance committee last week. The important point is that VAT will be applied to food supplements at the standard rate. The Revenue Commissioners had made a concession and allowed a zero VAT rate to be applied to certain vitamins, minerals and fish oils. They have

now made a decision to remove the concession, with effect from 1 March, such that VAT will be applied to all food supplements at the standard rate. It should be noted, however, that the zero VAT rate will continue to be applied to oral medicines, including certain folic acid, minerals and vitamin products licensed by the Health Products Regulatory Authority, as well as to infant foods. The Minister for Finance has agreed, as part of the discussion of the Finance Bill, to put in place a process that will conclude later this year in respect of the 2019 tax strategy group paper. The plan is to examine some of the policy choices in the VAT treatment of food supplements. That clarifies some of the points made by the Senator. I would be happy for the Minister to come to the House to have that discussion in due course because it is an important one to have and there is uncertainty. It is important to recognise that zero rates apply to certain products regulated by the Health Products Regulatory Authority and infant foods. People should be clear on that point and it behoves all of us to inform people of it. The point made by Senator Conway-Walsh is valid in providing information and ensuring clarity and certainty.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: There are many outside who are affected and I believe it would be useful to have a proper debate on the issue.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I would be happy to have that debate.

Senator Colm Burke raised the issue of housing. We will have that debate tomorrow with the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy.

I am happy to accept the amendment proposed by Senator Ó Ríordáin to the Order of Business. I congratulate the Senator and Deputy Noel Rock on the Bill which is an important one.

Senator Horkan is right in that the debate on the future of Europe is important. He is right to highlight the benefits and value of the European Union to this state and in the context of the situation post Brexit.

The mistake the British people made was that they did not adopt the approach of the former Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny. It was to have a citizens' assembly and a constitutional convention on Europe as part of the discussion prior to the vote on Brexit. That might have helped in having an informed debate. As Senator McDowell said, this is an important day with regard to the future of Ireland and relations between Ireland and the UK. It is extraordinary to see today that the British Government is, according to newspaper and radio reports, now supporting an amendment that would eliminate the backstop to which it signed up and agreed. As the Senator said, it is about the protection of constitutionality not only for us but also for the North. We have come on such a great journey since the Good Friday Agreement. We have a duty, as does the UK Government as co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to uphold what it stands for and means. I would be happy to have the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Coveney, come back when we know what has happened at Westminster today.

I am keen to send a message on my own behalf and on behalf of all of us to the effect that we stand with the Government in that we will not allow a situation where, as the Senator said, a number of mavericks within the Tory Party try to undermine our case. The Government has been consistent since day one. It is now incumbent on the UK Government and the UK Parliament to come forward with new plans such that we can have an agreement on 29 March. The backstop cannot be replaced. That is the bottom line. The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, and the Taoiseach have been quite clear.

Senator Lombard made reference to the boundary change in Cork. We had a debate on the matter as part of the Local Government Bill. I would be happy to have the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Deputy Ring, come to the House as part of the debate.

I appeal to Senator McDowell not to divide the House on the important issue of the future of Europe. The question is extremely important but putting it as part of a debate about the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill would be unfair to the Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, who I believe is in Cork today. I will accept Senator Ó Ríordáin's amendment, but I will not accept the amendment proposed by Senator McDowell.

An Cathaoirleach: Very well. Senator Ó Ríordáin has proposed an amendment to the Order of Business: "That No. 22 be taken before No. 1." Is the amendment agreed to? Agreed. Senator McDowell has proposed an amendment to the Order of Business: "That No. 4 not be taken today and that a debate on the future of Europe be taken in its stead." Is the amendment being pressed?

Senator Michael McDowell: It is.

Amendment put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 25; Níl, 15.	
Tá	Níl
Ardagh, Catherine.	Burke, Colm.
Bacik, Ivana.	Buttimer, Jerry.
Black, Frances.	Coghlan, Paul.
Boyhan, Victor.	Feighan, Frank.
Clifford-Lee, Lorraine.	Hopkins, Maura.
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Kelleher, Colette.
Daly, Mark.	Lawlor, Anthony.
Daly, Paul.	Lombard, Tim.
Davitt, Aidan.	McFadden, Gabrielle.
Devine, Máire.	Mulherin, Michelle.
Freeman, Joan.	O'Donnell, Kieran.
Gallagher, Robbie.	O'Mahony, John.
Gavan, Paul.	O'Sullivan, Grace.
Horkan, Gerry.	Reilly, James.
Humphreys, Kevin.	Richmond, Neale.
Lawless, Billy.	
McDowell, Michael.	
Marshall, Ian.	
Ó Céidigh, Pádraig.	
Ó Donnghaile, Niall.	
Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.	
O'Donnell, Marie-Louise.	
O'Sullivan, Ned.	
Warfield, Fintan.	

Wilson, Diarmuid.	
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Tellers: Tá, Senators Billy Lawless and Michael McDowell; Níl, Senators Gabrielle McFadden and John O'Mahony.

Amendment declared carried.

1 o'clock

An Cathaoirleach: Is the Order of Business, as amended, agreed to?

Senator Jerry Buttimer: On the importance of the decision which is the democratic decision of the Chamber, the Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, will not be available tonight, as I informed Senators prior to the vote. I am happy to accept the decision of the House, but the Minister of State will not be available tonight because she has ministerial appointments. The other result of the vote is that we have created a disappointing precedent in the House. I will discuss the matter with Senator Horkan.

An Cathaoirleach: The amendment has been passed. I must conclude my business. Is the Order of Business, as amended, agreed to?

Senator Jerry Buttimer: No.

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

Public Sector (Plain Language) Bill 2019: First Stage

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: I move:

That leave be given to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to improve access to public sector information and services by requiring plain writing in published documents; and to provide for connected matters.

Senator Kevin Humphreys: I second the proposal.

Question put and agreed to.

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

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: Next Tuesday.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Second Stage ordered for Tuesday, 5 February 2019.

Special Joint Committee on Climate Action: Motion

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I move:

That the Order of Seanad Éireann of 4th July 2018, relating to the Special Joint Committee on Climate Action, be amended in paragraph (f) by the deletion of ‘31 January 2019’ and the substitution therefor of ‘28 February 2019’.

Question put and agreed to.

Gnó an tSeanaid - Business of Seanad

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Before we conclude, I give the House due notice that it is my intention as Leader to put the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill 2017 on the schedule of the Seanad every week until it is passed.

An Cathaoirleach: That is a matter for the Leader.

(Interruptions).

Senator Jerry Buttimer: It is my prerogative as Leader.

Senator Victor Boyhan: No one said it was not. We will deal with the Senator’s decision daily.

Sitting suspended at 1.05 p.m. and resumed at 1.30 p.m.

Address to Seanad Éireann by Mr. John Horan

An Cathaoirleach: Thar ceann Sheanad Éireann, is mian liom fáilte chroíúil a chur roimh uachtarán Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, an tUasal Seán Ó hÓráin.

On behalf of Seanad Éireann, I warmly welcome the president of the Gaelic Athletic Association, Mr. John Horan, who has been invited to address the House in accordance with Standing Order 57(2) which provides for addresses by “representatives and persons in civic and public life”. I understand he is accompanied by his wife, Paula; sons, Jack and Liam; his sisters, Mary and Therese, and their husbands, as well as Alan Milton and Teresa Rehill from Croke Park headquarters. They are also most welcome to the House.

I also acknowledge the presence of John Costello, chief executive officer of the Dublin GAA county board; Jim Bolger, Leinster GAA council chairman, and John Cregan, chairman of Limerick GAA county board, the county that won the All-Ireland last year, we think. I also welcome Bob Ryan who is a senior figure in Cork GAA. He is a former chairman of the county board and now a member of the central council. There are probably many others that I am neglecting to mention but if I get a reminder I shall come back to them.

I congratulate Mr. Horan on his election as president of the GAA in what I understand was a landslide victory in 2017. He, therefore, has a strong mandate and I wish him well in his tenure

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in this very important role. I hear he grew up in a staunch GAA environment and that there was little chance of him escaping Croke Park and the GAA, having lived on Marguerite Road in Glasnevin, which is only a couple of long pucks from Jones's Road and rumbles to the roar of big crowds on match days.

The GAA is Ireland's largest and oldest amateur sports and cultural organisation. It is steeped in history, culture and tradition. It has played and continues to play a pivotal role in the lives and hearts of Irish people and Irish culture. It is about building a sense of community and identity at both local and national level. It reflects society in a very real way. It was in recognition of the GAA's influential role and impact on all aspects of Irish life and culture that we invited Mr. Horan to address Seanad Éireann today. The grassroots of the GAA can be found in every town and village and every school and parish in this country and beyond. The thousands of volunteer men and women around the country play a vital role in the GAA.

Coming as I do from the great county of Cork, the rebel county, I am sure Mr. Horan will forgive me if I make reference to some iconic names from the rebel county. I am thinking of the great hurler, Christy Ring, and the great ladies footballer and camogie player, Rena Buckley. I cannot forget our famous former Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, who graced Croke Park in both codes. He was an outstanding hurler and gave epic performances on GAA fields. He also graced the Houses of the Oireachtas as Taoiseach.

I wish to quote a few lines from the song written by Brian McNamara to the air of "Old Skibbereen" - I will not sing it - which captured the brilliance of Christy in his "Song for Christy Ring":

How oft I've watched him from the Hill move here and there in grace

In Cork, Killarney, Thurles town or by the Shannon's race

"Now Cork is bet; the hay is saved" the thousands wildly sing

They speak too soon, my dear garsún, for here comes Christy Ring.

We might be singing it again soon.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I hope.

An Cathaoirleach: I had the great privilege as a young boy many years ago to see Mick O'Connell and Mick O'Dwyer play down in Killarney and the old Cork Athletic Grounds. I was fortunate to attend the same boarding school as the late John Egan who played with the great Kerry team. I was lucky to get a Gael Linn scholarship as a garsún and sat in the same room and sometimes at the same desk as the great Páidí Ó Sé in the little school in Cill Mhic a' Domhnaigh beyond Ventry in west Kerry. When I did my final law examinations, I had a cup of coffee before going into battle in the company of the great Paudie Lynch, a solicitor in Killarney, and Johnny Callinan of Clare, a man who if he was in the current Clare panel would have won everything. We did our finals together. In my capacity as a junior player - I was never great but I loved the game - I played for my home club Muintir Bháire but I was fortunate, having emigrated for almost three years, to have played in New Eltham in south-east London, a long trip from where we lived in north London, and to have attended the opening of and played in the new Ruislip stadium. Reflecting further on the greats, I also had the privilege of seeing the great John Doyle, Jimmy Doyle and Tony Doran of Wexford play, as well as Eddie Keher,

Ollie Walsh and Henry Shefflin, of more modern times.

I could talk for years, but I will not. Somebody asked me recently what my wish was with regard to winning an all-Ireland final. Apart from Cork hurling and football, I said it would be great for the game if Mayo were to win an all-Ireland final, if Waterford were to win a hurling all-Ireland final and perhaps a team such as Monaghan to win. It would be great for the game if the Dublin hurlers were to win an all-Ireland championship.

There is no denying that having a GAA background was and still is seen as an advantage when seeking election to public office, not least to the Dáil and the Seanad. I am even told that flaunting a GAA medal in a hotly contested Seanad election can yield a few more votes. I am sure current Senators Paddy Burke and John O'Mahony might have something to do with that when they are canvassing for Seanad votes. I should also reflect on former occupants of the Chair of the Seanad, one of whom was a great close friend of mine, the late Rory Kiely of Limerick. He was Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann and also immersed in GAA politics. There was also the former Cathaoirleach, Pat Moylan, who graced the fields in Offaly.

Emigration has been a major blight on our country down through the years. I have had personal experience of it in my family, as have many others. In fact, eight of my 11 siblings emigrated. The countless emigrants who left these shores found homes among many diverse cultures and built new lives for themselves, deriving strength from their valued traditions. The GAA has played a key role in assisting the Irish abroad by developing the social and cultural life of Irish communities and underpinning and promoting Irish heritage and identity across the globe.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's relationship with the GAA is based on providing a strong community and social network. Probably more than any other organisation, the GAA helps to sustain a strong sense of community and heritage among our overseas communities. Through the global games development fund, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the GAA have provided matched funding for developmental projects in GAA clubs in Asia, Australia, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and South America. All have been truly invaluable in supporting and nurturing a sense of Irish community and many have created important links between the global Irish and their local communities. The GAA is an inclusive organisation that welcomes people of all nationalities, religions, ages and abilities and which endeavours to make it easy for everyone to take part. We all recently welcomed the decision by UNESCO to grant the national sports of hurling and camogie special cultural status which President Michael D. Higgins said was "a global acknowledgement of the unique cultural significance of this part of our national culture, and of the important role Gaelic games play in Irish society."

The GAA has invested heavily in the development of its grounds around the country, with the support of funding under the sports capital programme operated by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. It is, however, the association's headquarters at Croke Park which has been the subject of the most dramatic redevelopment. It is a magnificent stadium. I also congratulate the GAA on its recent redevelopment of Páirc Uí Chaoimh in Cork. We are all very proud of this remarkable 45,000 capacity stadium.

The significant health, social and economic benefits of sport are widely recognised. Mental and physical well-being is a huge factor in today's stressful society. We all recognise that sport and physical activity have huge potential to contribute to the development of a healthier society.

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Sport has the potential to build bridges between people like no other sphere of human activity. GAA games play an important role in communities by becoming the focus to bring people together to meet each other. Every summer the inter-county all-Ireland championships in hurling, football, camogie and not forgetting ladies football capture the attention of Irish people at home and abroad. Regional towns heave with the arrival of large numbers of supporters and all of the colour, noise and excitement that they bring, culminating with the showcase of all-Ireland finals in Croke Park. If you are lucky enough to have your team qualify for the final and get the chance to go, do not dream of missing it. Being in Croke Park and listening to Amhrán na bhFiann being played before the match begins fills your chest with pride and brings a tear to the eye. It is also hugely emotional for the diaspora abroad as they watch it on television or listen to the commentary on the radio.

Going local again, in Cork we are immensely proud of the fact that our ladies football team qualified for the final in most of the last few years and I commend their outstanding successes in Croke Park. I would not mind experiencing this joy again with our Cork male teams.

The GAA has undergone many changes over the years. In the context of contributing to peace and reconciliation on the island, its decision to abolish the rules which had prevented members of the security forces in Northern Ireland from becoming members of the association and Rule 42 which had limited the playing of games at Croke Park and all other GAA venues to only those controlled by the association was welcome and a positive development. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say 24 February 2007 was one of the greatest days in Irish sport when the Ireland v. England rugby match was played in Croke Park. Nobody quite knew how the crowd would react to the playing of “God Save The Queen”, but it turned out to be an occasion on which great respect and dignity were shown and it was a very significant step forward in relations between the two islands. We all recall the iconic images of members of the Irish rugby team and fans struggling to keep their emotions in check during the playing of Amhrán na bhFiann. We are hugely proud of the fact that the GAA plays such an immense role in Irish society. It is the lifeblood of so many communities throughout the Thirty-two Counties and the world.

Mr. Horan will have had a busy first year in overseeing the implementation of new competition formats in football and hurling. He has a reputation as a man who excels at getting the best out of people. I wish him well as he leads the GAA into 2019 when it will celebrate its 135th anniversary. A Uasail Ó hÓráin, is pléisiúr dom anois cuireadh a thabhairt duit Seanad Éireann a aitheasc. It is now my pleasure to invite Mr. Horan to address Seanad Éireann.

Mr. John Horan: Is cúis mhór áthais dom a bheith anseo i bhur measc inniu sa bhliain stairúil seo agus bhur gcomharsana bheál dorais an Dáil ag ceiliúradh chéad bhliain ar an bhfód. Mar uachtarán Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, agus ar son an chumainn ar fad - ár mbaill san aireamh - tá ardmheas againn ar institiúidí an Stáit agus an ról atá ag an Seanad i dTithe an Oireachtais. Gabhaim buíochas as an gcuireadh a bheith anseo inniu. It was with great delight that I accepted the kind invitation from an Seanadóir Denis O’Donovan to come and address the Seanad today, representing the wider GAA family and everything we purport to stand for. During this all-important decade of commemorations, some more straightforward than others to celebrate, it is worth taking account of the standing of our political institutions and the part democracy plays at the heart of Irish civic life. While we are avowedly non-party political, there is and has always been a crossover between the activities of the GAA and those elected to represent the people in national and local politics. It will always be thus. Countless figures have straddled both constituencies, many with national profiles, but one common goal we share is that we both strive to contribute positively to Irish society. Today I hope to touch on some

of the ways in which we set out to do that by outlining many of the activities that underpin our reach into Irish communities, many of them away from the traditional core activities on which Cumann Lúthchleas Gael was built.

I should set out by expressing our gratitude to the State for the support we receive annually through the auspices of Sport Ireland. The GAA spends €10 million annually in the area of coaching and games development. This figure includes an invaluable contribution of more than €2.4 million from Sport Ireland which allows us to employ more than 300 coaches and games promotions officers who work with young people throughout the country. While we would like to think we go some way towards repaying this in myriad ways, it is not something we take for granted and the funding is put to good use exclusively in the area of coaching and games development. Additionally, our wide network of facilities spread right across the island has received the support of the sports capital project for many years at every level of the GAA but most crucially at local level where our 1,500 clubs are justifiably proud of their facilities which, in many instances, serve whole communities.

It is also important to acknowledge and express our appreciation for funding which we receive from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Justice and Equality, the HSE and the National Office for Suicide Prevention. I am pleased to acknowledge that sports capital funding levels have increased after some of the challenges of the past decade. The establishment of a fund for larger capital projects at county and provincial level this year will be put to good use, not just by us but by all sports bodies.

As I will allude to, the positive impact of involvement in sport underlines the value of this State support at a time when we are experiencing profound social change in the country. Another source of support that may not be widely known is that which has been provided for our flourishing international network by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for many years. The support and co-operation of the Department in that growth process should be lauded. It has led to the State and the GAA working together on a number of overseas initiatives as Gaelic games have become one of the most powerful expressions of Irish identity for those outside Ireland. I will elaborate on this point later.

One of the most obvious changes and growth areas within the GAA family has been our activity away from the field of play and the games with which we are synonymous. Our reach and network of facilities have always made the GAA a focal point in towns and cities throughout the country, but in more recent times we have set about utilising that reach for the greater good, most notably through our community and health department and a number of innovative initiatives, not least our healthy club project. More than 220 clubs are active in following programmes that promote health and well-being alongside Gaelic games to include many people who never played our games and might never have been drawn to them naturally.

Rarely, if ever, has the importance of sport been more acute. The lure of technology and a less active lifestyle is a temptation that did not occupy the minds of the generation in which I grew up. It is a very real issue for the parents of young children today, knowing as we do that the lifestyle patterns formed in early life have a major bearing on the lives we lead thereafter. In addition to having real pride in our vast club network, the GAA is highly active in the education sector. It is extremely grateful for the support of thousands of teachers, of whom I was one for many years. We welcome and actively support the moves to have sport added to the subject list in schools. The GAA future leaders transition year programme, a joint initiative by the GAA and the Professional Development Service for Teachers, is a cross-curricular programme,

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comprising a series of modules designed to encourage maturity, initiative, responsibility and leadership skills in pupils. In addition, in the past eight years we have invested €2 million in assisting young people attend college through a special bursary programme. It is another of our contributions to nurturing the next generation. Similarly, our five star centre programme which aims to provide pupils with 60 minutes of exercise per week through Gaelic games proved a hit with teachers and children alike, with more than 400 schools taking part.

It is impossible to dispute the benefits of an active lifestyle. The mental benefits are no less significant than the positive physical effects. In the context of team sports, the sense of belonging to a group, chasing a shared goal and learning how to win and lose are life lessons acquired in a sporting environment which serve us well in every forum of life. As an organisation, we will assist in any way we can by offering our games and related activities to as many people as possible in the hope of exerting a positive influence on their general well-being.

What began 135 years ago in a small upstairs billiards room as an alliance of athletes, sports enthusiasts and nationalists has become the largest amateur sports association in the world. From those humble beginnings in Hayes Hotel in Thurles the GAA has grown into a global entity. We are enormously proud to be a towering presence in Irish life and communities through our network of clubs, all of which are driven by local volunteers who dedicate their time to the preservation and promotion of our native games. The GAA now has a worldwide presence. Some 400 overseas GAA clubs serve our diaspora in places such as Montreal, Madrid, Manchester, Maastricht, Moscow, the Middle East and Melbourne in a tradition stretching all the way back home to Mullinalaghta. Not only do the clubs provide a proud expression of identity for our young men and women living abroad, they are an invaluable support structure and network to help Irish people establish a home from home.

As time passes, our games are proving more and more popular with non-Irish people who are flocking to play them. This is testament to the quality of the native Irish games that the GAA was established to preserve, protect, nurture and develop. World GAA will again be celebrated this year, with over 90 teams coming to County Waterford to compete in our world games competition which serves as a reminder of the ongoing growth and popularity of the games, not least with non-Irish players. Hurling, Gaelic football and ladies football and camogie stand in any company when it comes to speed, stamina and, above all, skill.

Late last year our national sport of hurling received the prestigious accolade of intangible cultural heritage status from UNESCO. The award was the culmination of years of collaborative work between the GAA, academics and senior civil servants which was supported by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Madigan. Hurling is a national treasure. More than 3,000 years old, it has been used to denote our greatest heroes since ancient times. The UNESCO recognition reminds us of our responsibility to ensure this gift is passed on to future generations.

Last summer saw the latest in a long line of epic festivals of hurling. However, we are equally proud of the work being done with young people in lesser known hurling strongholds to allow them to experience the thrill of playing the great game, as former Deputy John Cregan will appreciate.

The GAA is about far more than just sport. The GAA club is very often the focal point of a community. More and more clubs are investing in walking tracks around their pitches to provide a safe and floodlit place for people to walk.

2 o'clock

It is another example of the GAA club responding to the needs of its members and community. The GAA is many things but it is always ultimately about people, people coming together and working together.

Our status as a volunteer-led, community-based and nationally spread organisation comes with important responsibilities. We voted unanimously last year to distance ourselves from links with gambling and our competitions are free from all alcohol sponsorship. In the coming months we will be working with Trinity College Dublin on important research taking place into ageing and enhancing the work we do in supporting senior citizens in communities. It is work in which we are proud to be engaged and it supports our aspiration to foster lifelong engagement with the GAA.

Our facilities are a source of immense pride to the local communities which have developed them, often building them with their own hands. In any given year 400 GAA clubs are supported by Croke Park in work undertaken to build clubhouses, improve pitches, erect floodlights and construct all-weather facilities for our members and wider communities. In the next two years the GAA will double to €4 million the amount invested centrally in this work. Pitches are the key because grey never goes back to green. Green space and sports facilities are the lungs that communities use to breathe. Without them we can see how areas can feel closed, claustrophobic, choked and starved of the oxygen that sport of any sort can provide. We urgently need politicians and planners to promise, protect and provide green space to let people breathe and let communities play.

Our facilities are stretched. They are a vital asset used by local primary and secondary schools and relied on by ladies' football and camogie, as well as promoting our own games. We do not have enough facilities to cater for our own games, yet it has become common for some in power to suggest funding for the GAA should be conditional on our facilities being made available to other sports. It is a requirement that is not levelled at any other organisation and one we reject. Funding for the GAA should be based on the genuine merits and needs of our association and its membership of more than 750,000 people.

At a time when rural Ireland is in turmoil, the GAA club is needed now more than ever. Communities that were in part identified by their local club are struggling to field teams. Amalgamations once unthinkable are now a practical way to survive. At the same time, we have faced up to the population explosion of more than two million people living in Leinster by employing dozens of additional coaches and investing an additional €1.5 million into helping clubs in our east Leinster project which looks at big urban areas in Louth, Meath, Wicklow, Kildare and Wexford.

A great man once said the challenge for the GAA was to be relevant and stay relevant. That is one by responding to the needs of the people we call our own. We do not measure our success in terms of cups, medals or trophies. The true value of a club is always based on the number of lives positively impacted on through their involvement with the GAA. When I travel throughout this island every week to visit clubs and communities, that is the thought that strikes me. Men and women well after their playing careers are over and others who never played much at all are out on cold nights and long days, inspired to get involved, give back and be a part of something bigger than themselves.

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In recent years we have worked hard to equip our volunteer officers around the country at every level to assist them in the work they carry out on behalf of the GAA. We have invested in education and hope some of the officer development training will also serve them well in their personal and professional lives.

Of course, society today expects higher standards in everything we do, regardless of whether we are a volunteer-led organisation. Adherence to regulations and best practice in general are cornerstones of the approach we take in trying to help our officers and units to be as efficient as they can in their time management and as compliant as possible. We are fully aware of the added workload and pressure this places on those members who work tirelessly to keep the show on the road.

However, I do believe we need to be mindful of these expectations. While involvement in the GAA is a way of life for many, it is, first and foremost, a hobby, something to be embraced and enjoyed. When the fun and satisfaction evaporates, so too does the goodwill. This is not a scenario we can countenance. For example, Garda vetting is something we take seriously. Could we simplify this process by examining the possibility of ensuring one process of vetting that would work right across the board for all organisations?

In short, I believe that societally we need to recognise that there are limitations on the weight we can ask volunteers to shoulder. Collectively, we need to cultivate and foster an appreciation of the volunteer movement throughout the country. We need to make it as easy as possible to be a volunteer and enjoy the experience, cutting down as much as we can on the red tape. Should those countless hours provided disappear, they will not be easily replaced, if at all. We need to consider every way of supporting and equipping those who put their hands up time and again, with the aim of assisting others to make communities better for everyone.

The GAA purports to be an inclusive organisation that caters for the whole family. This is evidenced by the number of families who watch and play our games. It is borne out by the men and women, boys and girls - many of them families - who attend matches providing us with our unique unsegregated match-day atmosphere. Of course, the Ladies Gaelic Football Association and An Cumann Camógaíochta are responsible for organising their own games, but we have excellent relationships with both organisations and are working closer than ever following our recent memorandum of understanding. At congress next month we will put a motion seeking to add the chief executives of both associations to the GAA management committee alongside our own director general. This is another symbol of the close ties that already exist and I look forward to seeing these ties strengthen in the months and years ahead. The one club model, whereby all of our games are organised under the same umbrella, makes sense and strengthens the reach and appeal of Gaelic games as sports for all.

I hope any such move in this direction would also see an increase in the number of women entering the administration side of the GAA. As things stand, many of our volunteer officers get involved when they finish playing our games. Strictly speaking, that means men who finish playing football and hurling, handball and rounders, given that ladies football and camogie are both independent entities. With closer ties and collaboration, I would dearly love to see the slipstream of recruitment widened to include more women. In turn, this would mean enhanced representation of women on our committees and organising bodies across the wide range of portfolios that need to be filled to power the organisation. I hope the next GAA president afforded the privilege extended to me today will be able to describe real and meaningful change in this area in the years ahead - perhaps that "he" will be a "she".

Faoi dheireadh, I sincerely hope I have given Members a flavour of the wide range of activities in which we are involved, many of which are away from the cut and thrust of the field of play. I am proud to be part of a vibrant and unique organisation, the rival of which I have yet to encounter anywhere. We acknowledge the challenges and the areas where we have work to do. I look forward to working with the legion of GAA members and many of the Members present in tackling those issues to ensure the GAA we pass onto the next generation measures up favourably to the one inherited by us, remaining as relevant to life in Ireland as the GAA is today. Go raibh maith agaibh as bhur n-aird inniu agus bhur gcuid ama agus go n'éirí go geall libh an dhea-obair atá ar siúl sa Seanad.

An Cathaoirleach: Before I call the next speaker who is Senator Ardagh, I remind Members that the principal spokesperson from each group has five minutes and that all other Senators have three.

I acknowledge the presence of some Deputies in the Visitors Gallery, including Deputies Cahill, Darragh O'Brien and Cassells. Also present is Pat Vance of Arklow who is the current cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council and Mattie Ryan who is cathaoirleach of Tipperary County Council. Councillor Ed Ryan is from Dublin and Councillor Gerry Walsh is a Wicklow councillor but I believe he wears the maroon occasionally. Councillors Seán Paul Mahon and Paul McAuliffe are also present and I welcome them too. I am a little short-sighted and just picking out people as I see them. If there are others present who I have not mentioned please let me know. They are all welcome and I hope they will have a lovely day.

Senator Catherine Ardagh: I would like to share my five minutes with Senator Mark Daly.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Senator Catherine Ardagh: I welcome the distinguished guests, Deputies and councillors to the Visitors Gallery. I very much welcome Mr. Horan. Cuirim fáilte mhór go dtí an tSeanad inniu roimhe. Is onóir mhór dom a bheith ag labhairt leis. I am delighted to be addressing the House today. On behalf of the Fianna Fáil group, I congratulate Mr. Horan on his election. His commitment to Dublin GAA over the decades, from volunteering at club level at Na Fianna and selecting at county level and managing county level teams, has paid huge dividends for him, the GAA community and the whole of the Dublin supporting community, of which I am part. We are very fortunate to have been very successful - I can see a smirk on Mr. Horan's face - in the past four years. I have attended all of those finals, thankfully and very gratefully, and they are such proud days and create such great memories for Dublin fans. I congratulate Mr. Horan. I am very glad that, after all the work he put into Dublin and his team and community, that he had the honour of presenting the Sam Maguire Cup to the Dublin team. That must have been a major highlight, something of which many people would be very envious. He has given so much joy to fans, clubs and communities. My late father and I used to try to get to as many matches as possible. It was something he really enjoyed. He went not as a politician but as a spectator. We would go to Croke Park to try to get tickets. I have great memories of attending matches with him and continue to attend with friends and fellow supporters within the organisation.

The GAA dominates many households in the country. As my father-in-law was the captain of the Donegal team in the 1970s, I cannot escape it. It is a major organisation and with that fact comes a large amount of responsibility, including responsibility for communities. Communities come together through the GAA, as we have seen in the last day in the context of the tragic

road accident in County Donegal. I understand all four of the victims were proud supporters of their local GAA clubs. All of the GAA clubs came out and rallied and made statements on the tragedy. It shows how much the GAA means to communities and how much communities mean to the GAA.

I echo the comments made about women's football. Some 50,000 people attended the women's football final, which was a huge success for Dublin. It shows how the sport has grown over the years and I hope this success will lead to more success. I thank Mr. Horan and wish him very well in the next few years.

Senator Mark Daly: I congratulate Mr. Horan and thank his wife, Paula, and his sons, Jack and Liam, for their role in his success. It required a lot of sacrifice, not only from Mr. Horan but from the family too. I thank and acknowledge them for their service and sacrifice. I also congratulate Mr. Horan on being the first genuine Dub to be president of the GAA. As coincidence would have it, Mickey Ned O'Sullivan was in Leinster House today. He was the captain of the all-Ireland winning Kerry team of 1975 and he has a distinction just like Mr. Horan in that he was the first Kerry captain to never receive the Sam Maguire and go up the Hogan Stand; the Dubs had a lot to do with that.

In his address Mr. Horan spoke about inclusion. I think of what the GAA has done in that regard, particularly in terms of the leader of the DUP attending the game in Fermanagh. That was a very important step by both sides because there would not have been widespread or unanimous support from the GAA side but that is how we build inclusion and make progress. He also spoke about the relationship with ladies football and camogie. I believe the memorandum of understanding is very important because there are issues and tensions at local level. The GAA has the facilities, while the ladies have the numbers; therefore, we need to make sure there is a structure for it.

Mr. Horan spoke about inclusion in the context of respect for the national anthem. I congratulate the GAA on being the first sports organisation to have sign language interpreters on the field of play for the official version of the national anthem, an issue which was debated in this House. I note that Mr. Alan Milton is in the Visitors Gallery. The GAA was the basis for the sports protocol adopted by the Oireachtas. The GAA has a far bigger protocol than other organisations, including some elements of the State.

Did expanding broadcasting bring with it greater inclusion in places such as England? That was the aim in doing so.

In the context of rural decline, Mr. Horan talked about politicians and GAA personalities being similar. I am not saying Pat Spillane is a politician, but he did great work on the issue of rural decline which is having a huge impact, especially in County Kerry where there is declining participation, not because the facilities are not available but because there are not the numbers. The activism of the GAA is important and it is addressing the issue and assisting the Government to come up with solutions. Perhaps Mr. Horan might address the issue.

My final issue is the price of tickets, which is of concern to people in County Kerry. Will Mr. Horan look at the issue to see how it might be addressed for families?

In my heart I cannot wish the Dubs the best in achieving five in a row, but I wish Mr. Horan the best of luck as Uachtarán Chumann Lúthchleas Gael.

Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh: Cuirim míle agus céad fáilte roimh an uachtarán, atá anseo le cur i láthair agus léargas a thabhairt don Seanad mar gheall ar an gCumann Lúthchleas Gael. I do not know if Mr. Horan is the first president of the GAA to address the Upper House.

Mr. John Horan: I am.

Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh: That is both very significant and particularly important. I congratulate Mr. Horan; his wife, Paula; the two lads and all of his friends and colleagues. It is a very significant occasion for all of us and we are very privileged that he is here. Cuirim míle fáilte roimh chuile dhuine de na Teachtaí Dála, comhairleoirí contae, agus cairde an uachtaráin atá anseo. The place is full in great recognition of Mr. Horan, his family and Cumann Lúthchleas Gael.

I wanted to find out what had made a Dub so successful. Perhaps it all goes back to Paula and County Meath. I met the former Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, about an hour and a half ago. He was on his way in travelling abroad and told me to say, “Good luck.” He added that he thought Mayo would be in the all-Ireland final this year. As a west of Ireland man, I would not begrudge him that. In fact, he told me that Paula was from Mayo. He was obviously mistaken.

I acknowledge the team and staff in Páirc an Chrócaigh, as well as the staff who are actively involved in developing Cumann Lúthchleas Gael throughout the country. It is a volunteer and very strong community organisation. The president and I have been on the board together at Páirc an Chrócaigh for almost five years and worked hard. In my experience, the staff in Páirc an Chrócaigh are second to none. I have not seen staff as professional in any business or organisation in which I have been involved. Mr. Alan Milton and the team are first class.

There are 2,200 clubs in Ireland and 400 abroad. The clubs outside Ireland are actually growing faster than those in Ireland. There is a relationship between GAAGO and RTÉ and on any Sunday up to 750,000 people sign in to watch games. Some 1.5 million attended championship matches in 2017. The amount of work Mr. Horan and his team are doing is absolutely phenomenal and the key to the fabric of the country. I am privileged to be associated with Cumann Lúthchleas Gael because it carries many of the key values of Irish people, namely, inclusiveness and our culture, language, tradition and sports. Perhaps above all, Cumann Lúthchleas Gael is wonderful for people who are not active in the game or may never have played it at a high level, yet there is a place for them in the organisation and they are involved.

Croke Park on All-Ireland final Sunday is amazing. My colleague, Senator O’Mahony, gave great pride and satisfaction to us in Galway back in the day by winning All-Ireland finals. Thankfully, two years ago, Senator Coffey had hung up his boots and was not playing as corner back for Waterford against Galway because otherwise we might have had a different result, but that is a story for another day. It is in the grassroots, the clubs and rural Ireland, as Senator Mark Daly noted, that the GAA comes into its strength. It is all about inclusiveness, not exclusiveness. I strongly welcome the point Mr. Horan emphasised about inclusiveness of females, as well as males. We are very open to this and keen for it to be fostered and developed.

In the two and a half years I have been a Senator, my greatest privilege has probably been to have been present today for Mr. Horan’s address. Personally and professionally, he is a great leader of Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, as was his predecessor, Mr. Aogán Ó Feargháil from County Cavan, who is another wonderful person with the proper passion, determination and commitment to our values.

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A former good friend, colleague and previous uachtarán of Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, Mr. Joe McDonagh, was the first Galway man I saw with an All-Ireland medal proudly on his chest. I am delighted that the Joe McDonagh Cup for the development of hurling has been named in his honour.

Táim an bhuíoch díot, a Chathaoirligh, as an gcuireidh a thabhairt dár n-uachtarán. Mr. Horan is the first president of the GAA to address the Seanad, which is a tremendous privilege. I wish him every success in the future.

An Cathaoirleach: We now come to the man to whom the Senator referred, Senator O'Mahony, who graced the fields in more ways than one as he was involved with three counties in coaching and training. I must remind him that the O'Mahonys came from Drinagh in west Cork, which is from where they got their football.

Senator John O'Mahony: I welcome an t-uachtarán, Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, Mr. John Horan, on this historic occasion. Last week we had the centenary of the first sitting of the First Dáil in the Mansion House and it is entirely fitting that the leader of the largest community organisation in the country which was formed 135 years ago should address the House.

As Mr. Horan pointed out, the GAA has its roots and tentacles in every parish and county in the Thirty-two Counties and united people in sport and culture in good times and war and peace. One of the advantages the GAA has over other sports organisations is a sense of place nailed on for one's parish or club. Over the years, particularly in recent years since the economic crash in 2011, the GAA has been an outstanding network abroad, promoting our games and culture. More importantly, it has helped young Irish men and women to find employment and have a sense of community abroad under the umbrella of the GAA. I have seen at first hand on my travels abroad on many occasions that people have found jobs through their connections and so on. I welcome Mr. Horan's officials to the House also.

Last week, through Alan Milton, I linked with a festival committee in Sarajevo in Bosnia which included a GAA coaching day in its festivities. Within 24 hours direct contact was made and support and resources were made available for the coaching day held in far away Sarajevo. I am sure that is happening in other international towns and cities on a continuous basis and it is greatly appreciated.

Any national organisation will experience controversies as there will always be a few. However, I compliment the GAA on the way in which it dealt with the Liam Miller issue and the game held in Páirc Uí Chaoimh, as well as other issues.

There is, of course, the pay-per-view issue to which other Members have referred. It is important that the GAA maintain its vital link with grassroots members who form the basis of its success. As such, I oppose any expansion of pay-per-view. The GAA has its roots among its supporters who should always be borne in mind.

Admission prices have been mentioned, but some of the debate in that regard is uninformed. As a strong organisation, the GAA must be conscious of the need to get bums on seats. The season ticket initiative of a number of years ago has been an outstanding success. Also, people may not be aware that under-16s are allowed into 99% of games for free. There is, therefore, a need for balance in the discussion. In that connection, I refer to provincial championship and qualifier games, in particular, at which there may not be a full attendance. During the years I have proposed to Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland that there be some link-up with tourists to

Ireland during the summer period. Perhaps they might offer incentives to fill some of the seats at reduced prices. Everyone would win. It is like when we travel to Barcelona, for example, and wish to take in a game. There is an opportunity to be taken advantage of.

I wish Mr. Horan well in the remainder of his term. He is the first president of the organisation from Dublin since 1924 and did not take the usual route. He came from the schools and colleges which form an important part of the GAA. I was the schools' delegate to the provincial council in Connacht for 25 years, albeit I have not reached the esteemed heights as Mr. Horan. I concentrated a little on the sideline. I wish him well in all of the challenges and opportunities ahead. It is ironic that he is in the Chamber two days after Dublin experienced two defeats in the O'Byrne Cup final which Senator McFadden celebrated and against Monaghan on Sunday. However, having met Mr. John Costello outside, I do not think there is any crisis yet. While I have no doubt that the Dublin team will be around to seek immortality through the five in a row later in the year, it is nice to know that they are human.

I thank Mr. Horan who I am delighted to see here today.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator O'Mahony is a humble man. He reached great heights within the GAA family.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: Cuirim fáilte roimh an uachtarán and his wife, two sons and distinguished guests. It is wonderful to have them here.

Ar an gcéad dul síos, déanaim comhbhrón le CLG Ghaoth Dobhair. Ba bhuille tubaisteach don chlub agus do mhuintir na háite an timpiste a tharla oíche Domhnaigh. On behalf of the Sinn Féin team, I congratulate Mr. Horan as uachtarán Cumann Lúthchleas Gael and wish him every success in steering the organisation for the next three years. Many of the challenges facing the GAA reflect those facing Irish society. I acknowledge the wider role the GAA has played in helping many people, young and old, with these same challenges. I was involved in the GAA. I played Gaelic football in London where I captained the Geraldines and the Sam Maguire clubs from Edmonton and Holloway. I was also a member of the county board. That was obviously in my fitter days.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: That must be from where the Senator gets her looks.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: I could take the Leader's comment in many ways.

Gaelic football and camogie serve to bring women from all over the country together for the sport, craic agus ceoil. They have played a significant part in my life and the lives of many people like me. On behalf of the diaspora, I thank Mr. Moran and the GAA for the good they have done for people's physical and mental health all over the world. My two sons play football and we are still very involved in the football club in Béal an Mhuirthead. I congratulate the club on winning the junior championship after so many years.

I thank the people who have submitted questions and issues they wish us to raise here today and that are very important. The ban on sponsorship by gambling companies is most welcome, especially in the light of the work of current and former players who have highlighted their battles with gambling addiction. I thank them for doing so. Many players and members have also used their profile to speak openly about their mental health and encourage fellow members of the GAA to use the supports available.

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I raise the issue of increased ticket prices. Prices for this year's national league games in divisions one and two have increased by 33%. The increase of €5 for old age pensioners is particularly disappointing as it matches the increase given to pensioners in the most recent budget. The GAA press releases announcing the increases stated it represented the first major review of championship ticket prices since 2011. However, many members and supporters felt this was misleading. This does not mean that ticket prices have not increased since 2011. Tickets are now 30% more expensive than they were at the height of the Celtic tiger. While unemployment is decreasing, the cost of living has steadily increased on all fronts. Attending GAA matches is a vital outlet for families and one of the most effective forms of entertainment. Was there any dissent at the meeting of the central council that decided on the ticket price increases? I take on board what Senator O'Mahony said about this but it is very important that the GAA communicate on the distribution of its finances. Otherwise, there will be a vacuum and people will not understand why they are being forced to pay such increases. Why was it felt an increase was needed? Was any financial justification offered at the meeting for the increase?

The increase in the price of a ticket for an All-Ireland final means that a ticket will cost €90 this year. For people from a county such as Mayo who must deal with travel and accommodation costs on top of the ticket price, this will mean that a day out in Dublin for a family will simply become too expensive, which is a pity. There is a worry that the GAA is focusing too many resources and too much funding on the eastern seaboard, particularly Dublin. Between 2010 and 2014, in terms of central games development money per registered player, Tyrone got €21; Mayo, €22; Kerry, €19 and Dublin, €274.40. Are there plans to review current funding models in the light of the relative success of the other counties?

Aim 1.2 of the official guide states: "The Association is a National Organisation which has as its basic aim the strengthening of the National Identity in a 32 County Ireland through the preservation and promotion of Gaelic Games and pastimes". Where in this stated aim does the selling off of the visual rights for these games to be put behind a pay wall sit? There are many GAA supporters in the Six Counties who cannot access free-to-air coverage. What is the GAA doing to engage with the growing conversation on Irish unity?

I must ask Mr. Horan about disability, in particular, autism, because I have had parents contact me about this issue. Where a family with a son or daughter with autism are members of the GAA and season ticket holders, they rely on the good will of stewards. Will the GAA consider introducing a disability card as part of a season ticket and perhaps extending it to carers? The GAA should also bear in mind the problem of guide dog users in trying to access grounds through turnstiles. Disability is not confined to wheelchair users. I have many other questions and regret that I do not have time to ask them.

An Cathaoirleach: I have been very lenient with the Senator.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: I acknowledge that.

An Cathaoirleach: I acknowledge the presence in the Visitors Gallery of Councillor Cormac Devlin whom I met earlier. He is very welcome.

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins: Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh an Uasal Ó hÓráin thar cheann an Grúpa Civil Engagement agus ba mhaith liom freisin moladh a thabhairt don tábhacht a bhaineann leis an CLG. I welcome Mr. Horan and commend him on the important role of Gaelic games in the social, cultural and sporting life of Ireland. The games and memories of

the games, teams and players are a major source of pride and inspiration for communities and people both in Ireland and across the world.

I have been lucky to experience twice the glory of Galway winning the all-Ireland hurling final, which is a moment no one forgets. I am proud of my cousin, Nollaig Cleary, who won nine all-Ireland medals with the Cork senior ladies football team.

What is important is not only the key moments and wonderful matches and events people might remember but also, as Mr. Horan noted, the role of the GAA as an experience for those who may never play in a county final. This role can be seen, for example, in the five-star system in schools and the idea of 60 minutes of playing and physical exercise which has such a lovely cultural resonance for people. The engagement and activity the GAA can provide for older members of the community are also important. The walking tracks were a practical example of this. It underscores a point we will debate at other times in this House about the need for green space planning, as Mr. Horan stated. It is important to invest in planning for full lives for people of all ages in communities, both rural and urban.

Gaelic games have a strong tradition and are passed down through generations. They have also been proved, particularly in recent times, to be a strong tool for cultural exchange and the integration of new communities. While there is a deep history, it is becoming clear that the future is and must be a diverse one. Inclusion, anti-racism and anti-sectarianism have been core priorities for the GAA. I would like Mr. Horan to elaborate a little on them. It is important that those who may be new to our communities and those who come from cultural traditions that differ from ours in other respects feel invited into and engaged with our sporting life as a nation.

When we speak about equality of participation and opportunities for participation, it is important to speak about the role of women's sport in the GAA. Given that almost 500,000 people watched the ladies' football final last year, there is clearly major interest in it. It was a positive step forward when the women's games were added to the free-to-air matches, the basis of which is that they are matches marked by a cultural exception and recognised as being of cultural importance to all of us across Ireland. However, there is still a deep inequity between the men's and women's games in terms of funding, representation and access to facilities such as pitches and training facilities for elite athletes.

There is also the ongoing task of bringing in a culture of respect, dignity and equality between genders and fostering that culture within clubs and teams. The sense of community and teamwork the GAA has exemplified is often exhibited in strong support between the men's and women's teams and the players who wish to see each other succeed and excel. Perhaps there is more the GAA could do in that regard as a champion of gender equality and equality in funding facilities and representation. Mr. Horan mentioned the one club model for games organisation and capital funding and facilities. There is important work to be done in that regard. I hope we will hear from the Ladies Gaelic Football Association and An Cumann Camógaíochta in the future.

Mr. Horan spoke about emigration which has been a measure of devastation in rural communities that have struggled at times to put a local team together. It is a sign of the need for greater support and opportunities for young people throughout Ireland. As mentioned, the role immigrants have played in maintaining and engaging in the sports and using them as a means of further cultural engagement is very important, as is placing the sports in a global community, as we saw recently in the recognition received from UNESCO. Will Mr. Horan comment on

the cultural importance of the sports and how it fits with the promotion of the Irish language and music? The GAA has often been a centre to promote wider cultural engagement.

I thank Mr. Horan and look forward to his responses.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: Mr. Horan is most welcome. It shows the respect he is giving to the Chamber that so many members of his family are present to witness his address. It says a lot about the seriousness with which he is taking the occasion. It is also great to see Mr. Alan Milton here. I saw him in Clones on Sunday. My memory of him in UCD in the 1990s is that he was more of a Liverpool fan than anything else, but I hope that will not impinge on his career path in the GAA. I welcome Mr. John Costello and very much expect that we will be renaming Collins Avenue after him and that in years to come, as he travels from Whitehall Colmcille GAA Club to Parnell Park, he will be walking along Costello Avenue.

I want to reflect on the themes covered in Mr. Horan's address which were absolutely excellent. He spoke about community, health, the importance of sport for mind and body and education, gambling and alcohol, the global reach of the GAA, gender equality, pitches going from grey to green and voluntarism. I do not come from a GAA background. I fell in love with the GAA mainly because of the Dubs in the 1990s. It was a hard sell in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I remember the time when I found a job on Sheriff Street in the early 2000s in a school with no yard and no background in the GAA. I had just qualified as a primary school teacher and had been trained at foundation level as a GAA coach. I attended a function at the time with the then president of the GAA, Mr. Sean McCague, and had the idea of forming a girls' Gaelic football team in the school. When I asked Mr. McCague if he could help, he asked what I wanted. I told him that I would love to have a set of gear. He then asked what colour. Two weeks' later he turned up to present us with the most beautiful green and white gear. We were successful in five Cumann na mBunscoil championships. For children with no place to train in their community or no club for which they could play, that investment by the GAA was inspiring.

Mr. Horan spoke about the maintenance of green spaces, with which I absolutely agree. This is not the time at which to make political speeches, but the strategic housing development Act needs to be re-examined. What needs to be investigated is how developments can proceed to An Bord Pleanála without cognisance being taken of local zoning. Z15 in Dublin City Council is under threat, as are pitches within the confines of institutional lands. We saw what happened at Clonkeen College in Dún Laoghaire and St. Anne's Park. The point is relevant. There is an overdependence on pitches on land owned by religious orders or other institutions. We must be conscious of this.

Pay-per-view has been mentioned. Anybody with an elderly family member who has a great love for the GAA but who cannot attend matches and does not have a Sky subscription knows that pay-per-view is a barrier. It is something on which the GAA should reflect. Knowing it as I do, the reality is that we know the money taken at the gate and pay-per-view income go back into the association. Everyone accepts this. However, once a barrier becomes the difference between someone attending and not attending a match or between someone watching and not watching at home on television, it has to be re-examined.

Mr. Horan referred to State funding. Our side of the House must examine that issue. The influence of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund on the body politic is remarkable. Unquestionably, the only ring-fenced funding in Irish politics is that fund. It amounts to €56 million

per year. A proportion of every bet placed on anything goes straight into the fund. No other sports organisation has absolute certainty of ring-fenced Exchequer funding every year. Considering what the GAA does for this country, the moneys Mr. Horan has mentioned are paltry compared with the unquestioned €56 million or so per year that goes into the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund.

I wish to discuss gender equality. I am heavily involved on the ladies side in Scoil Uí Chonaill, Clontarf. We should examine possibilities for gender accessibility at GAA grounds. I wrote to Croke Park about making sanitary products free in every GAA ground. I also wrote about breastfeeding facilities and taking a more sympathetic view towards parents attending games with infant children. I had an issue with this myself only last year when I was refused entry to Croke Park because I had an infant in my company. If we are to encourage a family-friendly environment and gender accessibility at county grounds and promote facilities, these suggestions need to be considered.

As the Cathaoirleach is facilitating me, I will make my final point. Regarding the integration of non-Irish populations, Mr. Horan referred to the GAA abroad. At a school in Carrickmacross 50% of the infant intake are non-Irish born or have parents who are non-Irish born. How are we utilising the GAA network? In many communities, if someone is not involved in the GAA, he or she is missing out because it is the lifeblood of those communities. In conjunction with the body politic, the Department of Justice and Equality and whoever else, how can the GAA facilitate a mechanism whereby those children can enter into the GAA family? While we are all lauding Mr. Horan's presence, if someone does not have a father, grandfather or great-grandfather involved in a local club, it can be difficult to enter into that space and become an equal member. That is a fair comment to make. Having said that, a French lady won player of the year with our junior B side at Scoil Uí Chonaill. There is evidence it can work.

An Cathaoirleach: The next speaker is Senator Conway. Approximately 12 Senators are left and I am conscious of time. I am timing contributions. I do not want to disappoint anyone, as this is a very special day.

Senator Martin Conway: I welcome Mr. Horan and his family members. I will start by acknowledging the Croke Park headquarters staff, both in Mr. Horan's office and the director general's office. In any engagement I have had with them I have found them to be courteous beyond belief and an example to other corporate entities in how to behave.

Much has been said about the GAA and its indelible link with our society. I saw this at first hand when my parish of Ennistymon qualified for the county senior football final for the first time ever. We did not win, but we as good as won it because the excitement, joy and pride that embellished our area for two weeks beforehand and afterwards could not be bought. It was fantastic. Clare has a proud history in hurling and football, although I attended both matches at the weekend where the result did not go our way in Thurles on Saturday or Ennis on Sunday.

Mr. Horan made a great presentation on how the GAA had evolved over many decades. I have a particular interest in the participation of people with disabilities in sport. I acknowledge what has been achieved in wheelchair football. In more recent times the GAA fun and run initiative has been getting people with disabilities and able-bodied people to participate at an equal level. That is absolutely correct and proper. As somebody with a disability, it would have been wonderful if I had had an opportunity to have been active like that when I was a young fellow. I am on the board of directors of an organisation in Kerry called the CARA Centre. I work very

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closely with some GAA icons like Matt Connor from Offaly and Aidan O'Mahony from Kerry. Our mission is to promote awareness and, more importantly, participation and inclusion of people with disabilities in all sorts of sports. I would like to see even more and closer links with the GAA. It is a shame this has been the first time a president of the GAA has addressed the Houses of the Oireachtas. It is a great honour. I propose, through the Leader and the Cathaoirleach, that we set up an all-party friendship group to keep this discussion and engagement going in order that we can support and help the GAA in any way we can. I refer to enabling a two-way conversation in the future. That should be the legacy of this extremely special occasion today.

Senator Paul Daly: I welcome Mr. Horan, members of his family, representatives from the GAA and the Deputies and councillors in the Visitors Gallery. There has been much prediction, talk of the “drive for five” and upcoming competitions in the year. I take the opportunity to thank the president of the GAA, as well as the Leinster Council, for the two fantastic competitions already organised, namely, the O'Byrne Cup and the Kehoe Cup. I was delighted to see the cream come to the top on both occasions.

(Interruptions).

Senator Gabrielle McFadden: Come on Westmeath.

Senator Paul Daly: An extension is being built onto the trophy cabinet in Cusack Park. We in Westmeath like to get our winning out of the way early in the year and make room for everybody else. We will I hope be there knocking on the doors later in the season also. I agree with what the president said about clubs, the club scene and how important clubs are in rural areas, in particular. I hope that bottom-up emphasis can be maintained. In my opinion and I believe the opinion of everyone, the club is the beginning and end of the GAA. When there is a bereavement in a family in a rural area, the GAA club will roll in and be involved in parking cars, stewarding, etc. The club will rally around the family.

In many rural areas in which foreign national people have come to live in communities, they are being integrated and naturalised into the community through the GAA club. We are seeing increasing numbers of foreign nationals, people of non-Irish origin, playing on teams, yet we do not have or hear of, thankfully, any incident of racism. That is one major plus for how the GAA integrates society, particularly in rural areas.

As the eldest son of a farmer, when we got our school holidays the emphasis for the summer was on saving the hay, the turf and the harvest. There was no social media then and I would not have seen my school friends if I had not been lucky enough to be a member of a GAA family. The tools were dropped and we were brought into town when there was an under-age game, the club seniors were playing at the weekend or the county was playing. It meant so much to me to be involved at the time of poorer communications. I would not have seen my school friends from June to September if it had not been for the GAA. That helped to form so many great friendships. We do not want to lose this. I know that it will not be lost because the president stated it in his speech. We cannot, however, forget or take the emphasis from the club. We need to keep the bottom-up approach. I would like the president to address at the end the changes made last year to try to make club fixtures that little bit easier. I refer to the break in April and the bringing forward of the all-Ireland finals in hurling and football. What feedback has there been in that regard? Is it working or does it need to be tweaked more? I ask because we need to facilitate the club as much as possible.

Senator Anthony Lawlor: I also welcome Mr. Horan and express my gratitude to the organisation he represents. The GAA has given me great experiences down through the years, from the first time my father bought me a hurl that he was hoping I would grow into but never played with after to the clubs I played with. I refer to Naas at under-age level and, latterly, Kill. The first match I played for the club happened to be in Newbridge. It is still Newbridge or nowhere.

I congratulate the GAA, particularly Seán Kelly, on the opening of all the stadia when rugby and soccer facilities were not available. I recall the match against England, as the Cathaoirleach mentioned, but also the rugby match between Leinster and Munster in Croke Park that took place in front of a record crowd. Possibly every person who attended that day would have attended a football match in the following weeks because the event was inclusive on the day.

I highlight the GAA because it has, at its basis, the local GAA club that is paramount in the community. GAA clubs have become much more involved in community life. For example, in my local club in Kill in Eadestown, one can see playgrounds being developed; therefore, there is integration between a new generation coming up and the current GAA club. Community games also are involved and ground football facilities are being developed by many GAA clubs. GAA clubs have an all-encompassing involvement with their communities and cater for all.

I must acknowledge the volunteers who work in each and every club. I come from more of a rugby background and have witnessed the work volunteers do for my rugby club in Naas, County Kildare. Therefore, I know that without volunteers, clubs cannot survive. No matter how strong a club's hierarchy is, if one does not have a man or woman to open the doors to the training facilities on a Tuesday or Thursday night, to open the gate to the pitch on a Sunday when matches take place, or to collect the odd few bob at the gate from people attending, one will not have a successful club.

One point on which I would like to engage with the GAA - I have spoken about this issue in terms of rugby and soccer - is the drop-off in the number of young people who play nowadays. Many clubs up and down the country cannot field minor teams because of the drop-off at 16, 17 and 18 years of age. I have also seen the number of players reduce at under-21 level. We need to encourage people to stay involved.

I wish an t-uachtarán all the best. Last year he presented a cup to the winning Kildare under-20 GAA football team that beat Mayo in the all-Ireland final. It was one of the best games of football I attended the whole year. I say that with a Senator from Mayo seated to my right. I hope the Dubs have not got T-shirts printed already.

Senator Victor Boyhan: I warmly welcome an t-uachtarán to the Seanad. I also welcome his wife and family, the Oireachtas Members, the sitting county councillors and the distinguished guests in the audience. I acknowledge that this event would not have happened without a lot of work being done by a lot of people. They know who they are and I thank them for making it possible.

As I sat here I asked myself what I had in common with the GAA. I will share a story that talks about a past. The word "identity" has been used a lot today. As a young Church of Ireland Protestant boy in south County Dublin, what did I have in common with the GAA? The answer is very little. As a matter of fact, my State public school did not encourage any GAA sport. It is important to note that fact because that was disappointing for many young children who did

not have prejudice. Kids are not prejudiced against anything. We had a yearning and were keen to play hurling. I acknowledge two great curates, one in the Church of Ireland on the left-hand side of the road in Monkstown village and another very innocent curate in the Catholic Church located on the right side of that road. Anyone who knows Monkstown village will know that there are two massive churches on either side of the same road. Back in the 1960s, it was an offence in the Church of Ireland even to play sport on a Sunday. However, it was through the initiative and encouragement of both curates that we played hurling on Sundays. They organised a few hurls for us young boys and taught us how to play the sport. Certainly, I am a handy man with a hurl at this stage. I learned how to play the sport and loved hurling. I continued to ask right up into my teens why were we not allowed to play in our school and education system. The identity of the GAA has moved on and is inclusive. As everyone has acknowledged, the GAA is a very inclusive organisation and inclusive in sport. The GAA has many interesting and large characters from the Church of Ireland community who have played huge roles in the organisation. One person who came from the Church of Ireland tradition and who I knew personally was president of the GAA. I acknowledge that important point.

Voluntarism also has been acknowledged today. I live between and attend the activities of two great GAA clubs, namely, Cuala of Dalkey and Kilmacud Crokes.

3 o'clock

I acknowledge the work of the volunteers.

I also pay tribute to two people who have been special to me and are great ambassadors for the GAA, Councillor John Bailey in Cuala GAA in Dalkey who did enormous work way beyond that of a volunteer and Mattie Kenny, a Galway man, who did wonders for Cuala GAA and is now going to do wonders for Dublin.

Senator Frances Black: I welcome the uachtarán of the GAA. I thank you, a Chathaoirleach, for inviting him to the House. I happened to be in Croke Park this morning at an addiction conference. I must say and agree with the Cathaoirleach that just looking across Croke Park fulfils my heart. It is a beautiful place to visit. I have always felt happy at any GAA game I have attended. I probably feel happiest when I am at a match, be it football or hurling, although hurling is my first passion. I would love to see the Dubs win the hurling final at some point. It is also great to see a fellow Dub in the role of uachtarán.

I am aware of the alcohol and substance abuse programme run by the GAA. It is wonderful. My colleague, Senator Lawlor, spoke about the drop-off in the numbers of young people. As I work in the specific area of addiction and mental health, I am very familiar with that issue among young people. I have given many talks on it in GAA clubs around the country. I wish to highlight the mental health aspect. In excess of 1.4 million people in this country have alcohol harm issues. That is huge. There is an impact on young people, whether it is a parent, brother or sister. I spoke in a GAA hall last year where a young lad said he had had to give up his football because his mother had an alcohol problem. He was worried and could not attend the GAA training sessions because he had to stay at home and mind her. The impact on his mental health was that he had to walk away from his passion. There is an increasing incidence and I hope the uachtarán will examine the issue as a priority for the future. There is no doubt that alcohol is a depressant. There is a huge binge drinking culture among young people. They talk about drinking to the black. As alcohol is a depressant and causes depression, we must highlight the impact it has on young people, particularly their mental health. Addiction is increasing, whether it is

drugs, substance abuse or gambling. This morning I spoke to Oisín McConville who speaks openly about his addiction to gambling. If the uachtarán wishes to have a chat about it some time, I would love to have a cup of coffee with him.

I thank Mr. Horan for coming to the House and congratulate him again.

Senator Paudie Coffey: Thank you, a Chathaoirleach, for inviting an t-uachtarán, Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, to address Seanad Éireann. This is an historic day for all of us, including Mr. Horan and his family. I welcome them to the House, as well as all of the invited guests in the Visitors Gallery.

The uachtarán represents every player, volunteer and official of the GAA in the Chamber today and in his work every day. Many Members of the Oireachtas are proud to be members of the GAA. I am and expressed my gratitude to the GAA for what it has given me, my family and community over many years. I had the honour of playing in club, county and college and Portlaoigh in County Waterford. The greatest honour for any GAA member is to give something back. I have had the honour of serving as chairman of my GAA club, which I continue to do. Every little club in the country has aspirations. Members spoke about identity and pride. They can be found in no better place than the GAA - the pride of the parish or the honour and glory of the little village. We all see this each day throughout the country. We must nurture it and never take it for granted.

I acknowledge the great amount of work volunteers and officials, from the bottom up, do throughout the country. There are challenges and there is no need for me to tell the uachtarán what they are. I have concerns about the issue of club versus county. There is much debate within the GAA about it. We should keep our club units strong because that is from where a county's strength comes. We must always be very cautious of this. We must also try to develop the weaker counties. It is one of the biggest challenges the GAA faces.

The issue of prices has been raised. I believe it is for the GAA to decide. There is no more democratic organisation than the GAA. Every member has a say, whether at club level, county board level, provincial level or central council level. The GAA has to sustain its business, which is the running of games and ensuring there are adequate referees, coaching, staff and volunteers, and that takes finance. I do not have a problem with it. People will pay if they wish to do so and I guarantee that venues throughout the country will be thronged for big games. I was at the national league game between Waterford and Offaly on Sunday with my 13 year old. He got in for free. Every under 16 year old can go to a national league game for free. We do not hear that being spoken about. It encourages young people into the GAA. Those of us who can afford it should pay. Any other organisation would charge much more.

I wish Mr. Horan the very best in the year ahead. He has ambitions to strengthen the grass-roots and clubs and I encourage him to do so. He will find a lot of support, cross-party and independent, in the Houses of the Oireachtas as he tries to achieve it.

Senator Máire Devine: I was a camogie player in Dublin and then in Belfast in the 1980s and 1990s. It is great to see the difference that has been made in the North. Communities can now play football or camogie without hassle. There has been a great improvement.

Mr. Horan spoke about well-being and mental health. The logo, the wearing of the jerseys and players speaking out about their struggles and difficulties have definitely added to the destigmatisation of those suffering from mental ill health. The GAA in Crumlin, my area, is host-

ing safeTALK which helps to protect communities from the risk of suicide. Young people, girls in particular, come to the club with difficulties and the club is trying to do its best to help. We have to encourage the personnel at clubs to undergo the training and feel confident in helping individuals, even if it only involves acknowledging the problem and passing it on to professionals.

The “grey to green” idea is very important for Dublin. I know that there is a lot of love for Dublin in this Chamber. It has been congratulated in the past year, or perhaps it was over the last four, with passion by everybody in the Chamber. Certainly between the canals in Dublin 8, there are issues with pitches. St. Kevin’s hurling club is going through financial issues. Perhaps the new president could magically help in that regard also.

On the idea that vetting should be universal, all organisations should know that there is a backlog of applications with the Garda. It seems prudent and would save time for those volunteers who want to give of their time. We are making a lot of work for ourselves in that regard.

I acknowledge the passion of the people involved at the coalface, including the trainers and coaches who give so much. I imagine from their number will emerge an inspiring and influential woman who will be the next president. Up the Dubs.

An Cathaoirleach: I remind Senator Devine that there was only one player, namely, Jack Lynch, who left Croke Park six years in a row with senior All-Ireland medals.

Senator Aidan Davitt: Cuirim fáilte roimh an uachtarán agus a chlann. Tá aithne agam ar Jim Bolger, cathaoirleach comhairle Laighin, agus ar a lán comhairleoirí agus Teachtaí Dála anseo inniu. I am surprised that there are so many Members with so much to say about the GAA. I would be surprised if many of them knew whether a ball was pumped or stuffed, but we learn something new every day. The GAA will have many new friends when its officials leave here today.

An Cathaoirleach: The GAA has become very inclusive.

Senator Mark Daly: It is a broad church.

Senator Aidan Davitt: The GAA has always been very inclusive. I am delighted to welcome the uachtarán. The GAA is a roots-up organisation, as shown by the president through his involvement with schools, in particular, as well as clubs, counties and provinces. He rose to the top in all of these areas. I have been privileged to serve with club and county on the executives of Clonkill and St. Loman’s GAA clubs and Contae na hIarmhí. The skills I learned have stood me in good stead in politics. The skills I learned dealing with an organisation of volunteers have really been a help to me in life in general. The GAA is the last lifeline left holding most rural communities together. I believe its facilities can be to the fore in arresting rural decline. I know the president on a personal level and he has been brave in showing leadership wherever he has been. I encourage him to keep up the good work and keep putting clubs to the fore, as he has always done. He was never a shrinking violet in backing clubs and we appreciate all he has done for the club network.

A couple of comments were made. The president discussed the integration of ladies’ games into the mainstream GAA. Many people might not know it, but there are costs involved. Registration fees for ladies’ teams are three times as high as those for mainstream guys’ teams. That is a problem. The cost will be a big factor for the president and the organisation in the future.

Some Seanadóirí who spoke were on about the cost of tickets. I was requested to look for some tickets for Steely Dan. The cheapest ticket one could get was nearly €200. If it was a matter of going to Steely Dan or to an all-Ireland final, going to the final would be a privilege for me. I would be lucky to get a ticket. I remember a couple of years ago a guy wanted £200 for a ticket to an FA Cup Final. I just do not know about some Senator's appreciation of value for money. The family ticket was not talked about. Senator Coffey who is going to games rather than talking about them is aware that those under 16 years do not pay to go see games. Many people get free passes, while old age pensioners only pay half price for tickets. The family ticket was a great concept from the GAA. I appreciate the president being here and all of the great work he has done for the association since he has been involved.

An Cathaoirleach: I might squeeze in the rest of the Senators who have indicated but I ask them to brief as otherwise somebody will be left out, something I do not want to happen.

Senator Frank Feighan: The uachtarán, his family and the GAA family are heartily welcome. This is very historic. It is a great day and it is great to see the uachtarán here. I come from a different side of the GAA. The late Sean Young who was my manager played for Derry. He always said I was more interested in where we were going after the match than in the match itself. I ended up running the Roscommon supporters club. We have great memories of bringing a boat from Boyle to Carrick-on-Shannon when we played Leitrim, bringing four buses to Castlebar and going to London and New York. They are memories of times I really enjoyed and for which I feel fondness and pride. That is something about the GAA. One meets other supporters and everyone mingles. When I brought the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly to Croke Park in 2015, the parliamentarians from England, Scotland and Wales could not believe there was no such thing as segregation at matches. I was very proud to tell them that it was a voluntary, amateur organisation, although it was not amateur in the way its business was run, on which I congratulate the president.

As we know, the GAA was set up to foster Irish games. It brought about a renaissance in nationalism. The GAA was very involved in the War of Independence but at this time I thank it for its respect for and memory of GAA players who fought in the First World War. As somebody who believes these men should be remembered from a nationalist point of view, I pay tribute to the GAA for doing so in recent years. What we all thought of as Hill 16 was originally known as Hill 60. In the 1930s members of the Connaught Rangers fought at Hill 60 during the Gallipoli campaign. It was known as Hill 60 until the 1930s when some senior figures in the GAA decided to call it Hill 16. I point to the complexities in our histories. However, the president is heartily welcome and I congratulate him on representing a new Ireland. Whether in the Thirty-two Counties, London, New York or anywhere else in the world, the GAA represents a new Ireland. I thank it very much for doing so.

An Cathaoirleach: I think Kerry are coming to get the Dubs.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: Cuirim fáilte is fiche roimh uachtarán Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, an tUasal Seán Ó hÓráin, agus a chlann. Tréaslaím leis ar an óráid shuimiúil a thug sé dúinn um thráthnóna. It is a great privilege to welcome the president of Cumann Lúthchleas Gael to the Seanad. It is an historic day. I congratulate the Cathaoirleach, the Leader and all those who made the necessary arrangements. It is amazing that such an event has not happened before. I am very glad that it is now taking place and that I am part of it. I welcome the many distinguished guests from the world of Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, many of whom are also involved in politics, which is no surprise because those involved in the GAA are patriots. They love their

country and wish to play a part and give service. In spite of the calumny heaped on politicians, that is also what we try to do.

There has always been a great relationship between the GAA and the national spirit in Ireland, going back to the founding of the GAA in 1884. The GAA was always in step with the forward looking nationalist Ireland and the nationalist movements at the time. Last Monday we commemorated 100 years of Dáil Éireann. Many Members of the First Dáil such as Michael Collins, Harry Boland and some Members who were in jail gained their nationalist spirit from their involvement in the GAA.

Although I welcome all of our visitors, I will be forgiven for picking out my neighbour and great friend, former Deputy John Cregan. He had a very successful career in politics which culminated in his appointment as Government Chief Whip. When he left politics, he went back to County Limerick and, hey presto, all of a sudden they won their first all-Ireland title for 45 years. One must give John Cregan, with many others, credit for that achievement.

The chairman of Tipperary County Council, Mattie “Coole” Ryan, is in the Visitors Gallery. His brother Paddy, a great GAA historian, brought out a book last year, the title of which, *Cut-tin’ or Atein’ the Bushes*, reveals the ferocity of parochial hurling in Munster.

One of the greatest memories of my youth was being brought to Croke Park for the first time at the age of ten years in 1962 for the All-Ireland semi-final between Kerry and Dublin which, thankfully, Kerry won. I will always remember climbing the high concrete steps at the back of the Hogan Stand, emerging from a tunnel of darkness and looking down on the beautiful green sward of Croke Park with flags flying, Dublin in light blue and, of course, our beloved green and gold. It is said Mick O’Connell played his greatest game that day. We went back to Croke Park in September and beat Roscommon to win the all-Ireland final. A Listowel Emmets clubman of mine, the late Garry McMahon, scored a goal within 35 seconds, which is still an all-time record. The Cathaoirleach quoted his great father, Bryan McMahon, in his excellent speech.

For me, this is a day to thank the GAA from the bottom of my heart for all it has done for the country and the fabric of our society which it has helped to mould. I see the thrill I experienced in Croke Park in 1962 being replicated in my grandchildren. I have two young grandsons, Pádraig and Éanna, who love going to matches with us. The thrill they get from watching their teams play is something one cannot buy.

As I stated, the GAA has given a lot to politics. In my county Austin Stack, Dan Spring, Jimmy Deenihan and Seán Kelly were involved in both the GAA and politics, as was Henry Kenny in another county and, of course, as the Cathaoirleach pointed out, the greatest of them all, Jack Lynch.

An Cathaoirleach: I thought the Senator’s grandchildren wore the red jersey.

Senator Kieran O’Donnell: I welcome Mr. Horan and his wife and family. I acknowledge the presence of the chairman of the Limerick County Board, former Deputy John Cregan, and Mattie Ryan, a former colleague of mine on the Mid-West Regional Authority.

Many institutions in the State, including the church, have fallen. The GAA is now effectively taking up that leadership role for young people across the country. Up and down the country, the GAA is very much taking that leadership role for young people, which includes a

significant amount of responsibility. How does Mr. Horan expect it to evolve?

One of the GAA's features is that it has the greatest network of volunteers in the country. It is in every branch, town, village and city and must consider its strengths. Mr. Horan probably will be aware that many of the grants to sports and community areas are given to community facilities where sports and community combine. Any facility the GAA considers building should have a large community aspect because the GAA is already there and has the use of the grounds and because it has the infrastructure to ensure the facility is sustainable and will be maintained. Over the years, I have seen too many cases where projects are built, people do not have the structure to sustain them and they become white elephants. When GAA clubs up and down the country are submitting grant applications, I encourage them to consider the community aspect of the local community centre.

I acknowledge that the president visited Limerick, as he has done a number of times. He attended our celebrations to mark Limerick winning the Liam McCarthy Cup and said he hoped to return to present it again to us next year, to which we will hold him. I met him at one of our local clubs, Ahane GAA, once the home of Mick Mackey and now of the Morrissey brothers. My club, Monaleen, is a city club and its hurling teams features Andrew La Touche Cosgrave and Lorcan Lyons.

The GAA has an enormous contribution to make but with that comes a great deal of responsibility which is not limited to the specific area of sport.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: Cuirim fáilte go dtí an Teach seo roimh an uachtarán, a chlann agus na daoine uilig atá anseo inniu. Cuirim fáilte roimh na comhairleoirí agus all the special guests in the Visitors Gallery this afternoon freisin. I enjoyed the uachtarán's speech. He covered many aspects of the GAA and the many aspects of life that are manifested throughout the organisation. In particular, we reflect on the community of south-west Donegal, as was mentioned, which is going through a very difficult time. A dark cloud hangs over that part of County Donegal, where four young men lost their lives. I extend my sympathy to the extended families and the community of west Donegal as they try to come to terms with the horror that happened last Sunday night. It should be remembered that the four young men, all in their 20s, who lost their lives were all members of GAA clubs. I have no doubt that the GAA community in west Donegal and throughout the rest of the county will put its arms around the families and others in the community as they try to come to terms with the tragedy.

The four young men in their 20s were members of Cloughaneely and Gaoth Dobhair GAA clubs. John Harley was captain of Cloughaneely GAA club in 2016 and 2017 and player of the year in the latter year. Shaun Harkin and Daniel Scott were also members of the Cloughaneely club, while Micheal Roarty was a member of the Gaoth Dobhair club, where he won an all-Ireland vocational schools medal and played at minor level for Donegal. Mr. Horan pinpointed many aspects of the GAA and its qualities. As I said, it will wrap its arms around the families and the community of west Donegal in the tough few days that lie ahead. It is another example of the GAA's fantastic work and how it touches every parish and community in the country. It is important that we recognise the good work the GAA does, as was outlined by Mr. Horan in his fine speech.

On a lighter note, I attended the match in Clones between Monaghan and Dublin at the weekend. Mr. Horan is a Dub and this has the potential to be an historic year for Dublin as the drive for five championships in a row pushes on. The performance of Monaghan at the week-

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end will give confidence to many teams throughout the county that the great Dubs can be slain. That amounts to back to back success in the league over Dublin. We beat the Dublin team in Croke Park last year and beat them again last Sunday. Speaking as an Ulster GAA man, I am keen to highlight that the GAA in Ulster can be proud of the fact that the last team to beat Dublin in the championship back in 2014 was Donegal.

I attended the match in St. Tiernach's Park in Clones at the weekend. It would be remiss of me not to mention St. Tiernach's Park, Clones, which is the venue for the Ulster finals. There is an ongoing campaign to ensure the Ulster finals remain in Clones for the foreseeable future. I appeal to Mr. Horan to bring away that thought for consideration. It is shared by not only by Gaels throughout Monaghan but also throughout Ulster. They are attempting to try to keep the Ulster final in Clones for many years to come.

An Cathaoirleach: As now we have to balance the books, I will call a Dublin Senator, Senator Gerry Horkan, to say a few words. He should not over-elaborate on four-in-a-row or five-in-a-row.

Senator Gerry Horkan: I will not because I think Senator Devine did that well enough. As it happens, when I was running for the Seanad, I discovered that I had a great-grandfather from County Monaghan; therefore, I can live with these things. I have Mayo, Carlow and Roscommon connections also.

I thank the GAA president for his measured, deeply thought-out and comprehensive speech. I was a councillor for 12 and a half years in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council before I came here. On the bannister in Dún Laoghaire County Hall is a sign with the letters KTC which stand for Kingstown Town Commissioners. It would not have been the greatest bastion of Gaelic sports back when that hall was built in 1899 and opened by Queen Victoria, yet from that small county which is only eight miles long and five miles wide we have Kilmacud Crokes and Cuala. These clubs have done particularly well in recent years, despite the fact that they are competing with soccer, rugby, cricket and many other sports that are common in south Dublin. It is a true testament to the GAA that it can be truly an all-Ireland sport in every part of every community, whether large or small. We have other great clubs, including Ballinteer St. John's, St. Olaf's and Geraldines P. Moran GAA Club in Foxrock.

These are significant clubs but there are challenges too. I know many Senators who come from rural Ireland have spoken about the challenges in rural Ireland. Equally, as the GAA president will know well, I imagine, there are challenges for clubs in built up urban areas. These clubs are trying to field hundreds of teams and simply do not have the space for it. Mr. Horan knows about that challenge. When I was a member of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, we tried to increase the number of pitches, put in all-weather pitches and increase allocations, but it is a major challenge for the clubs.

Together with Senators McFadden and Burke and some others, I visited Australia recently where we met members of a club in Melbourne. They were so appreciative. On that visit I learned that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was involved and gave funding. That is most welcome but anything that the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade can do to expand on that funding would be welcome because it is a real lifeline for anyone who is abroad. A friend of mine from Pallaskenry in west Limerick came back with his children for the all-Ireland final and was lucky to be able to find tickets to do so.

I am keen to touch on one small point, Mr. Horan and I were talking before this debate commenced. You introduced me as a south-sider, a Chathaoirligh. I had to point out that my father actually went to school in St. Vincent's in Glasnevin, where the GAA president ultimately went on to teach and become the principal. I am now starting my sixth term on school boards of management, including my fourth as chairperson in two different schools where the GAA president has taught and is principal. The workload that goes into being a school principal in any secondary school in the country is extraordinary. I do not doubt that Mr. Horan's school had a significant workload. For him to be able to do all of that, as well as be involved in the GAA, not to mention becoming president in a landslide victory as a Dublin person, is testament to his character and that of his family. Perhaps as a Dublin person and the chairperson of a school board, I appreciate that more than some others. The workload involved is phenomenal. For Mr. Horan to give up of his free time, of which I imagine he did not have much, and do all he does for the GAA and the people of Ireland in every corner of the country, including all 32 counties, I thank him very much.

An Cathaoirleach: I now ask the Leas-Chathaoirleach, a proud Kerryman from Killarney, to say a few words. I am not sure if he is for Dr. Crokes or the other club.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I also wholeheartedly welcome the president of the GAA, Mr. John Horan, to the Seanad. I also welcome his guests; his wife, Paula; sons, Jack and Liam; sisters, Mary and Therese, and their husbands; Alan Milton and Teresa Rehill from Croke Park, and all our distinguished guests.

Not wishing to sound in any way triumphalist, coming from the county of Kerry, I can speak with some authority on the marvellous contribution the GAA has made to the sporting and cultural life of the country. We are a modest people in Kerry and some might say that, recently, we have a lot to be modest about. I will not boast about how frequently over the years we have been to Croke Park and come home with medals and trophies, whether at club or county level. Even as recently as this weekend we had a very encouraging win over Tyrone. I will not say anything about the Dubs but I am wearing the wrong colours today, being more in blue than I would like.

Senator Mark Daly: The Senator is wearing his party's colours.

Senator Paul Coghlan: It is with great pride that I recall the great games over the years, not least the epic Dublin-Kerry clashes in the 1970s and 1980s which still live in the memory.

In difficult times in this country the GAA has provided a sporting and cultural outlet, raising the morale of the people. From Ballybunion to the Bronx, the GAA was on hand in assisting our emigrants through sport and providing networks for friendship and employment opportunities. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade works closely with the GAA abroad to provide strong community and social networks for the diaspora. The playing and singing of the national anthem at the beginning of matches is something which instils pride in us all. I recently had the honour to chair the Seanad public consultation on the national anthem and one of the themes to emerge was the desire for sportsmen and women to know the words of the anthem when it was played at the start of matches, particularly when matches were being televised and the camera was focused on the players during the anthem. I ask if this is something Mr. Horan might promote with GAA players during his tenure. The committee also agreed an Irish sign language version of the anthem for members of the deaf community and I was pleased to see it performed in Croke Park at the all-Ireland final last year. I ask that the GAA continue this practice also.

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As previous speakers said, the GAA is part of the Irish consciousness and plays an influential role in Irish society that extends far beyond the basic aim of promoting Gaelic games. To follow the tone set by the Cathaoirleach and honour my own county, I will quote some lines from the ballad “Dúchas” or “The Kingdom’s Green and Gold”, written by the illustrious Garry McMahan who was a native of Listowel, an all-Ireland football medallist, raconteur, writer, singer and composer.

Grey lakes and mountains soaring high, Mount Brandon’s holy hill,
The little church at Gallarus, our language living still,
The Skellig Rock, stout football stock, they can’t be bought or sold,
For our county’s fame, we play the game in the Kingdom’s green and gold.
We savour Kerry victories, we salute a gallant foe
And when we lose, there’s no excuse, we pick up our bags and go,
So raise your glass each lad and lass to our warriors brave and bold,
Who again aspire to the Sam Maguire in the Kingdom’s green and gold.

That is my cultural contribution. I thank Mr. Horan for his interesting address to the House. I wish him well in his tenure as president of the GAA.

An Cathaoirleach: Mr. Horan does not have to answer every question that was put to him. I will allow discretion in that regard.

Mr. John Horan: I thank the Cathaoirleach. I was thinking we might be here until 6 p.m. if I had to deal with all of the questions I have been asked. On behalf of the association, I thank everybody for his or her comments on the organisation I am representing as uachtarán. A great volunteer effort and commitment to Irish society are made by our 750,000 members nationally and our club structure.

On a sad note, I concur with the comments of Senators Gallagher and Ardagh on the loss of four of our members in County Donegal. It is an area I know well. In fact, I attended the dinner dance of the Cloughaneely GAA Club on 28 December 2018 when Fr. Sean Ó Gallchóir was MC on the night. I saw his name quoted in the newspapers in the past few days as he visited the scene and the bereaved families of those young lads we have lost. I have been in touch also with the chairman of Donegal County Council who is also a member of our managing committee. The Ulster Council and the Donegal county board have rowed in, as the GAA always does, in support of those families in their deeply sad loss.

I always knew the GAA brief was broad, but the brief before me today is very broad. I refer to the LGFA and our relationship with camogie. We have made a great deal of progress recently within a short period by drawing up a memorandum of understanding. It is a very detailed document which is due to be implemented in full in the next three years. One area, in particular, that has caused concern historically is property. We always think of *The Field* when we think of Ireland. We have put protocols in place to make it much easier for camogie and ladies football to access GAA pitches.

The question of membership was also raised by Members. The membership issue is slightly

skewed but we have put a sub-committee in place to look again at getting a common membership across the board. Membership for camogie and ladies football involves two completely different organisations which cater for women. One then has membership of the GAA. One also could be a member for handball. We intend, working closely with both organisations, to streamline that area and improve it.

The issue of rural decline was brought up. I do not want to sound political but I will be very honest as that is my style. The GAA is helping in dealing with rural decline, not causing it. We are not the ones closing post offices and failing to deliver the Internet to rural parts of the country. It is our members in those areas, however, who are finding it necessary to leave their local communities, move to the east coast or to foreign shores. These are the problems which need to be solved. While we will be there to provide the facilities and the networks, we cannot, ultimately, be held responsible for rural decline.

Tickets were mentioned. The only heartening thing I got from the events of last week was, as I mentioned in my opening statement, how relevant we are as an organisation. Every television and radio show and newspaper went on about the fact that the GAA had increased the price of its tickets. I will point out a few facts. A lot of Members said the GAA clubs in their communities were very important. When we decided to raise the price of our tickets, we put in place a programme of spending for the increased revenue. As an association, we have decided to increase our grants to clubs throughout the country from €2 million to €4 million in the space of four years. Funds must be obtained to do this. The grants for those clubs will increase employment locally through investment in infrastructural projects. That is where we are putting €500,000 of the extra revenue.

We have also referred to the importance of the GAA to the diaspora. I am sure many Members have visited cities internationally in which the GAA has clubs. Those clubs are important to young Irish people who travel overseas looking for employment and contacts, having found themselves away from home for the first time. They are looking for a social outlet which GAA clubs in those cities provide. However, the GAA units in those parts of the world must be funded to operate. As such, €200,000 of our increased revenue will go to those international units. They do not have large sponsors or significant gate receipts and we must help them from home. We do a great deal of work with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. People in this country must recognise that we will not continue to get people into America in the way we did in the past. Unless we promote Irish culture, be it the language, dancing, music or games, in the US, our relevance in the Irish community there will decrease. Last August I attended the continental youth championships in Boston. It was a family holiday for all those families who were there. To give Members an idea of its importance, the city of Buffalo brought in increased revenue of \$3 million through hosting the previous year's the continental youth championships. All this came from hosting a GAA event for four days. That is another day where our increased revenue has gone.

We are also directing funding to improve the facilities we provide for our supporters in county grounds. I think somebody alluded to and made a little dig regarding Newbridge, which needs a new stand. Delivering it is on our agenda. Navan needs a new stand and delivering it is also on our agenda. Senator Coffey will be delighted that helping Waterford in its progress is also on the agenda. That work cannot be done unless we have a revenue stream and that is what we did it for. We are also giving the rest of the money back to the county boards.

On a point of information, last Thursday, before the start of the national league, we sold over

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3,000 more season tickets than we did in the previous year. This was during the height of the criticism of our price increases. Attendances at national league games last Sunday marginally increased to 87,000 from the previous figure of 86,000. People may want to criticise us but the decision made at Central Council - I will answer the question about the vote - was unanimous because we made the case to the people that we were raising prices to do something with the money for our membership and the community within the country. We will not apologise for doing good work on the ground. In relative terms, regarding the actual attention we received, I looked at it as being a case of the glass being half full rather than half empty.

Some Members have complimented our staff. Two of my staff are with me today, namely, Alan Milton from the communications unit and my PA, Teresa Rehill. Senator Conway alluded to the courtesy shown by both the president's office and the ard stiúrthóir's office. That is all one now and the responsibility of Ms Rehill.

Senator O'Mahony raised the issue of Fáilte Ireland. We have tried on numerous occasions to build a better relationship with Fáilte Ireland and made a bit of progress lately. We will have a launch in the embassy in London to promote the Connacht championship there; therefore, that is progress. Even my own club makes a contribution to the GAA in terms of its international context. Experience Gaelic Games is a programme running in my own club, which is very close to Croke Park. We link in with and bring tourists to our club to give them information on hurling, Gaelic football and the historical background of the GAA.

The issue of funding for counties was raised and the disparity therein. A certain angle is being taken with regard to statistics. The one thing I will say is a large part of the extra funding that goes to Dublin goes to schools. The coaching programme we drive on goes to schools. The population of young children is in Dublin and that is where the money is going. Somebody raised the point about inclusion. If we are to have inclusion with the GAA, the only way we will get non-nationals - or internationals to use a more correct term - that is, people who arrive in the country, to get involved in our games is to get to them in schools and then encourage them to join clubs. Naturally, people coming from other lands to Ireland will see a big institution like a GAA club but if a child says he or she wants to go down and see the coach he or she met in school, he or she will go down. When people from a foreign culture come to Ireland, they come with international sports such as soccer, rugby or basketball. As a school principal, I found this to be the case. We had quite a proportion of students from the Philippines because we were very close to the Mater Hospital and they were all into basketball. We had eastern Europeans who took to rugby, while others took to soccer; therefore, people come to Ireland with their own sporting cultures. We tend to get more international buy-in to our sports through primary schools than at second level.

I think Senator Davitt made a comment about politics. I think it was Seán Kelly who construed the great phrase, "There is politics and then there is GAA politics." Senator Davitt was well trained before he arrived here. We taught him well.

Among other points raised were Scór, culture, music and dance. We have celebrated the start of our 50th year of promoting Scór throughout the country. In Páirc Uí Chaoimh on Saturday night last I attended a programme organised by the Munster Council in promoting Scór. There will be a follow-on in the other provinces throughout the country.

Senator Conway-Walsh mentioned the idea of an all-party group. I would be more than open to some relationship between ourselves in Croke Park and an all-party group here where

we could work to each other's benefit.

Senator Paul Daly raised the issue of fixtures in clubs. We are aware of all it. We are aware of the problems therein and doing our best. Unfortunately, across such a range of issues, it is complex. We have different under-age groups, colleges, hurling and football, and club and county. It is a complex issue but we are quite aware of it.

Senator Boyhan raised the issue of his Church of Ireland religion. I am proud to say Jack Boothman, one of my predecessors as president of the organisation, came from that church.

Another issue raised was television rights. I am delighted to see that RTÉ has improved its performance in showing our games. Sunday night last was a perfect example when we had two hours of promotion of our games. It is the national game and it is the national broadcaster. GAAGO provides a wonderful opportunity for our members throughout the world to see games. I visited a club in Toronto last May and was able to text my wife sitting in Parnell Park and tell her, "I see you are wearing a white jacket today," such was the clarity of the picture that I, sitting in my hotel room in Toronto, was getting of Kilkenny playing Dublin in Parnell Park. We are doing our best. The word "Sky" is touchy with some people. Ours is a democratic organisation. We have put it in front of our membership; they are happy where it is and that is what it is.

There are difficulties in the broadcasting of our games in Northern Ireland. In trying to resolve them, we have met representatives from the community there. It is not all our problem. We have done our best to promote the games in Belfast. We have put a €5 million project together called "Gaelfast" to drive on the promotion of our games.

I will correct one point because I think that is the norm in the House. Belmullet won the intermediate championship, not the junior championship, in Mayo.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Rose.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: I know; I was there.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The backroom machine must not have been working upstairs.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: It was that I had so many questions to ask and was running out of time.

Mr. John Horan: On access to Croke Park and other venues for those with disabilities, we do our best but there are health and safety restrictions and other issues involved. While we try our best to do it, I will not say we get it right all the time, but we are doing our best to do so.

In regard to autism and disability, we have the Fun and Run. We have disabled hurling, which is played with considerable passion. With regard to our summer camps, we are conscious of the July period. Many may not know that in the education sector there is an allowance in July for children with autism to get extra attention. We are trying to work it into our summer camp scheme. We are conscious of those difficulties.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: I also raised the issue of family access to matches to include children with autism.

Mr. John Horan: I will conclude with one point because I have probably gone beyond the time allowed. Senator Black brought up the issue of alcohol. We are conscious of it. We were

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criticised for taking on the sponsorship of Guinness quite a number of years ago. There was stonewall silence when we distanced ourselves from it. To their credit - I hope this is a road to the future - the Limerick hurling team, having bridged a gap of 45 years, have never allowed the Liam McCarthy Cup to enter one licensed premises or any alcohol to touch the cup. I hope that is a step in the right direction. I compliment John Cregan on his leadership in Limerick for that initiative and that happening.

I thank everyone for his or her courtesy. On behalf of the association, I thank the Seanad for the honour of being given the opportunity to speak. I hope we can all work together because, as I stated, we are all here for the benefit of Irish society - strong, rich, poor, disabled and fully able. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

An Cathaoirleach: Before I call the Leader, I welcome Deputy Billy Kelleher. It is very good to see Members of the other House come here to recognise the great work we do and acknowledge the presence of an t-uachtarán of Cumann Lúthchleas Gael. I did not formally congratulate John Cregan who has been mentioned a few times. He is a long-time friend of mine from when he was a Member of the Seanad and the Dáil. Limerick had great success last year. Unfortunately, I was unable to go to the game because my son got married the day before and I had to attend to more pressing family matters.

Was it Senator Devine who mentioned the Geraldines?

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: I did.

An Cathaoirleach: I toggled off for them a few times in England but never came across her. She is probably a lot younger than me.

As I call the Leader to respond and conclude, I thank him for his support and encouragement for this great event on this great day.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Cuirim fáilte roimh uachtarán Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, a bhean chéile Paula, a mhic Jack agus Liam agus na daoine uaisle sa Public Gallery. Thug an t-uachtarán oráid iontach agus lá stairiúil atá ann. Táimid ag ceiliúradh an méid oibre atá déanta ag an gCumann Lúthchleas Gael i ngach áit sa tír. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Uachtarán, na baill foirne ó Pháirc an Chrócaigh agus go mórmhór na hoifigigh as gach Cúige as ucht na cluichí iontacha a shocraíonn siad gach lá agus gach seachtain.

In welcoming the uachtarán I thank him for his presence, which is a symbol of the esteem in which we, as elected representatives, hold Cumann Lúthchleas Gael. Our thoughts today are with the families of the young men in County Donegal who were members of the organisation. As we always do as a family and community, we join together in celebration and tragedy.

In his speech the uachtarán covered a lot of ground. I certainly think his performance augurs well for his future. Perhaps he might follow some of his predecessors into the world of politics. Given the presence of so many luminaries in the world of politics in the Visitors Gallery perhaps they are watching him with great eye. Deputy Kelleher might be glad that he will not be running in the Munster constituency in the European elections.

The backdrop to our debate in the Chamber, the presence of Mr. Horan and the work of the GAA is the UNESCO award in recognition of hurling. It is a symbol of what we stand for in a new modern Ireland. The president of Cumann Lúthchleas Gael has addressed Seanad Éireann.

Today, in another parliament, significant votes will be taken on the future of the United Kingdom's relationship with Ireland and the European Union. The leadership shown by Cumann Lúthchleas Gael at key moments in the history of the country demonstrates the importance of the Gaelic Athletic Association to every one of us, whether we are from urban or rural Ireland and whether we play or administer.

UNESCO speaks about the key points of transmitting from generation to generation the respect in which the organisation is held in each community, the sense of identity and culture and what we stand for as members of Cumann Lúthchleas Gael. Mr. Horan's speech and the actions of so many every week in classrooms, ball alleys, street leagues, parish leagues and myriad competitions are about respect for our culture and the promotion of diversity and inclusivity. That is why today it is so important that we recognise, admire and thank members of the Camogie Association and the Ladies Gaelic Football Association. I hope we will soon become one and that there will be no demarcation of roles and responsibilities.

Today Cumann Lúthchleas Gael is about more than just results and games. It is about the people, who we are and where we are from. Mr. Horan referenced the beginning in that room in Hayes Hotel, Charles Kickham's pride in the village, the commentaries of Mícheál Ó Muirheartaigh, the wonderful writings of people like Seán Moran who is in the Visitors Gallery and the way in which local radio has brought our games into homes across the world. Look at where we have come from and what we have achieved. It is about the North American championships in the first weekend in September. It is about being able to go across the world and watch our games on GAAGO. It is about accessibility. It is also about players, not just the club player but also the street league player and the player who dreams of being the All-Ireland winning captain. I was going to say on the first and third Sundays of September but on whatever Sundays in August they are now. That is what to what we aspire. That is why we want to promote not just the ideals and ethos of Cumann Lúthchleas Gael but also what we all stand for as Irish people. At the matches last weekend, there was no rancour or trouble walking out of Nowlan Park or the Dublin-Monaghan game, only good humoured banter and people looking forward to the warm days of May and June when the championship begins. We are so lucky as an association and a country that Cumann Lúthchleas Gael unites people.

Mr. Horan alluded to the issues facing rural Ireland. I assure him that the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Deputy Ring, is well aware of them. To answer Senator Conway-Walsh, that is why the Government will use €1 billion to regenerate rural Ireland. That is why there are more jobs being created in rural Ireland under the Government. However, it is important that we all work together. Someone mentioned Pat Spillane and his report for the Government. It is important that we use our positives and bring them together in revitalising the country.

I commend Mr. Horan on the role he played in the Liam Miller match and bringing people together last autumn. Perhaps a few words were said behind the curtains, but it was a wonderful occasion and demonstrated the generosity and big heartedness of Cumann Lúthchleas Gael.

The issue of player welfare has been raised during this debate. Speaking as someone who was a schoolteacher and immersed in third level education, it is important that we get player welfare right. I commend Mr. Horan and the members of the coiste bainistí on trying to achieve that balance. He was right concerning the necessity of the association balancing its economic needs with future development at club and county levels. My good friend, Senator Coffey, wants to see Waterford play its championship games in Waterford.

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Senator Paudie Coffey: Hear, hear.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Deputy Cassells, another good friend of mine, wants to see Meath play in a revitalised Páirc Tailteann. That is what the GAA does. I am proud of what we have achieved in Páirc Uí Chaoimh, notwithstanding some of the commentary. I commend the role Frank Murphy has played in Cork GAA and Irish society. He has given decades of service to the association. He is a leader. He had a vision, determination and was a wonderful administrator of Coiste Chontae Chorcaí. I thank him and pay tribute to him for his work. I wish him well in his retirement and Kevin O'Donovan well in his new role. It is people like Frank Murphy who developed and brought Cork to where it was - the county with the most all-Ireland titles in Cumann Lúthcleas Gael's history.

(Interruptions).

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Mar fhocal scoir, this is a wonderful day. The GAA is evolving, as it has done through the years, unafraid of embracing change, be it in the form of the physical infrastructure of stadia, the development of the games or the need to win the battle against technology, as Mr. Horan mentioned. The GAA brings out the best in us. It is the most democratic organisation in the country.

Senator Martin Conway: Correct.

4 o'clock

Senator Jerry Buttimer: As someone who served on the county board and the chairman of my club, it is the most democratic, people-centred and community-based organisation in the world. I thank Mr. Horan, Mr. Alan Milton, Ms Teresa Rehill and all of the staff at Croke Park, as well as the new ard stiúrthóir, Mr. Tom Ryan. I wish them every success.

Senator Victor Boyhan: Well said.

An Cathaoirleach: That concludes this very historic occasion of the visit of an t-uachtarán, Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, to the Seanad.

Gnó an tSeanaid - Business of Seanad

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Notwithstanding anything in today's Order of Business, I propose that No. 3, statements on local government: directly elected mayors, not be adjourned at 6 p.m. and that the debate on the future of Europe not take place.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Senator Gerry Horkan: It will take place, just not today.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: As I mentioned earlier to Members-----

Senator Gerry Horkan: The debate will not take place today but it will take place some other day.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: That is correct. There is no need for Senator Horkan to worry.

He will have his debate.

Directly Elected Mayors: Statements

Acting Chairman (Senator Catherine Noone): I welcome the Minister of State.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I thank the Acting Chairman and Members of the House for allowing time for statements on the issue of directly elected mayors.

As I undertook to do during our consideration before Christmas of the Local Government Bill 2018 which was signed into law by the President on Friday, 25 January, I am pleased to have the opportunity to outline proposals which I intend to present to the Government before the middle of February on the issue of directly elected mayors with executive functions. I wish to further inform the proposals through input from both Houses of the Oireachtas. Last Thursday afternoon there was a debate in the Dáil in which all Members who wished to do so contributed. We are doing the same today in the Seanad.

As Senators are aware, A Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to consider fully directly elected mayors in cities as part of a broader range of local government reform measures aimed at strengthening local democracy. On foot of that commitment, last September I submitted to the Government a policy paper entitled, Local Authority Leadership, Governance and Administration, which included a number of policy proposals for directly elected mayors in cities. The policy paper was approved by the Government at its meeting on 27 September and forwarded to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government for consideration.

The Government also agreed in principle that plebiscites would be held on directly elected mayors with executive functions in Cork City Council, Limerick City and County Council, Waterford City and County Council, Galway City Council and Galway County Council at the same time as the local government elections in May this year. This decision was subject to the necessary provisions for the holding of the plebiscites being included in the Local Government Bill. Following the progress of the Local Government Bill 2018 through the Houses, it provides for the holding of plebiscites on directly elected mayors with executive functions in the local authority areas of Cork City Council, Limerick City and County Council and Waterford City and County Council. The Seanad sat late that night and removed Galway City Council and Galway County Council from the legislation. The amendments were subsequently approved by the Dáil.

The Department is prioritising the Government's instruction to produce more detailed proposals for plebiscites, the questions to be put to the electorate and the specific powers of mayors. The detailed proposals, including an analysis of the costs involved, will be submitted to the Government in the early weeks of February. Prior to reverting to the Government with the more detailed proposals, I wish to consult Members of both Houses of the Oireachtas. As Senators are, local government legislation divides local authority functions into executive and reserved functions. The proposed office of directly elected mayor with executive functions aims to bridge the gap between the two categories of functions. I emphasise at the start that the

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reserved functions of councillors will not be affected by the changes if adopted by the people in a plebiscite for a directly elected mayor. Those functions will still be reserved for councillors.

I believe that, subject to some exceptions, responsibility for executive functions could be transferred entirely to the directly elected mayor. The directly elected mayor would be a member of the council and continue to perform the functions currently exercised by local authority cathaoirleach, mayors and lord mayors, including reserved functions. This would encompass a civic and representational role where the mayor would act as the face of the local authority, both domestically and internationally. Given the potentially wide range of functions performed by local authorities, the directly elected mayor's role would have to be supported by a chief executive officer. My proposal is that the executive mayor would have a similar relationship to the local authority chief executive as a Government Minister has to the Secretary General of a Department. A mayor's functions would exclude executive functions relating to planning matters, for obvious reasons. They would remain with the chief executive. Chief executives would also continue to be responsible for organisational and staff related matters. This is similar to the arrangements in Departments where the Secretary General is responsible for such matters.

It is important to stress that the elected council would continue to exercise its full range of reserved functions. It would also be the primary body with responsibility for oversight of the mayor in the performance of his or her functions and holding him or her accountable. I intend to propose a mechanism to recall the mayor, giving the electorate a means of having its say in recalling the mayor. In addition to the directly elected executive mayor proposals, I will propose a further strengthening of the strategic planning committees, SPCs. My intention is to create a Cabinet style system where the chairs of the various SPCs would form the mayor's cabinet, replacing the existing corporate policy group. Senators who are familiar with local government structures in the UK will be aware that many local authorities there have councillors who are leads in specific policy areas. That would give more teeth to the position of SPC chair at local authority level in this country.

The policy paper will analyse the costs involved in establishing a new position of directly elected mayor. This analysis is to include the costs of the position of mayor and of the plebiscites to be held. This is an important requirement of the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform. As I mentioned, it is intended that the plebiscites on directly elected mayors with executive functions will be held on the same day as the local government elections on 24 May 2019. Anyone who is entitled to vote in the local government elections in the local authority areas listed will be entitled to vote in a plebiscite on directly elected mayors with executive functions. Regulations for the holding of the plebiscites and their necessary requirements and arrangements will be made by the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy. Information for electors on the proposals to be voted on in the plebiscites will be drawn up by the Department and sent to the local authorities concerned for distribution to electors. Given the need to explain fully the proposals to the electorates concerned and allow sufficient time for local debate, this will be a priority for the Department in the weeks ahead.

The Government decided at its meeting of 27 September that in view of the complexities of local government in County Dublin and the Dublin metropolitan area which is defined in the national planning framework, it would be appropriate to allow space for detailed and informed public discourse on the matter of directly elected mayors for Dublin. For that reason, the Government decided that the issue of directly elected mayors for Dublin would be referred to a Dublin citizens' assembly to be convened in 2019. The Department of the Taoiseach is leading on the convening of the Dublin citizens' assembly, with the input of the Department of

Housing, Planning and Local Government. Consideration will have to be given to the membership of the assembly, for example, whether the assembly should include elected officeholders similar to membership of the Constitutional Convention. I believe the assembly should include elected officeholders, both local and national. There is a range of complex policy questions to be examined by the Dublin citizens' assembly, including the geographical area that would fall within the Dublin mayor's remit; consideration of the functions of the directly elected mayor; the proposed relationship between the directly elected mayor and the local authority elected members and executives of the local authorities involved; and the interaction between the directly elected mayor and other bodies involved in the development of the capital such as the National Transport Authority and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, the State utility providers and trade and investment promotion agencies.

I thank Members of the House for their ongoing engagement on the issue of directly elected mayors and local government issues in general. The establishment of offices of directly elected mayors with executive functions would represent a significant change and development in the political accountability of leadership at local authority level. I look forward to hearing the views of Members of the House.

Acting Chairman (Senator Catherine Noone): I thank the Minister of State. The contributions of group spokespersons should be ten minutes. All other Senators will have six minutes.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I thank the Minister of State. It was very eventful here before he came in. It was a great honour for us all to be in the Chamber today.

My colleagues in Fianna Fáil support the roll-out of directly elected mayors in cities. However, I am concerned that the Government's decision to send the idea of a Dublin mayor to a citizens' assembly is a delaying tactic. Dublin should lead the way in this new form of local government. Dublin leads the way on so much. This is so disappointing. At a time when people feel alienated from decision-making it is important that new ways of empowering local communities be put in place. Directly elected mayors act as local champions who are directly accountable to citizens. We should enthusiastically embrace the idea as an internationally proven way of ensuring local decisions are taken at local level.

We published our own legislation to roll out a directly elected mayor for Dublin as an international city competing with others across the globe. Dublin should have strong local government focused on Dublin issues. Especially in the light of Brexit, Dublin faces a series of unique challenges that demand strong leadership to enable it to compete against other global cities, whether in attracting investment and businesses inward or in lobbying for national or European funding. Mayors have a vital role to play, for instance, in working within the Committee of the Regions structure in Europe to secure EU grants or European Investment Bank funding. A Dublin mayor could help to secure additional money for specific Dublin projects such as revitalising Dublin Bay and utilising Dublin's maritime tradition.

Experience from abroad shows that a directly elected mayor can provide that crucial leadership. All we have to do is look at the successful London bid for the 2012 Olympic Games launched by Mayor Ken Livingstone as an example of the role a mayor can play in achieving something big for his or her area. We should look at New York where Rudi Giuliani led the complete transformation of New York, combating crime with a zero-tolerance approach. From the most dangerous city in the world it became the safest. In the darkness after the terrorist attack on 11 September 2001 he was a beacon of light and showed real civic leadership when the

city was grieving.

The model of directly elected mayors has been successful across the globe in fighting for cities' interests and acting as local champions. They provide direct accountability and their leadership on these issues is key. It does not make sense that the capital city will be left behind while other cities get a chance to decide whether they want a mayor. The argument for directly elected mayors rests on the concept of leadership. A key individual provides an opportunity to drive forward an agenda, to fight for the advancement of local government's needs, to heighten the visibility of the local authority and the locality and to broaden engagement with the public and promote greater accountability. Mayors provide clear lines of accountability and effective leadership in order that it is clear to everyone where the buck stops, to use the old phrase.

The Fianna Fáil general election manifesto is committed to holding plebiscites on establishing directly elected mayors in key cities in Ireland. This Bill initiates a referendum in Dublin. It will be used as a pilot project with the possibility of the measure being rolled out in other cities in the coming years, if successful. Dublin has four local authorities, four chief executives, four mayors, 183 councillors and countless State agencies which often compete against each other rather than work together. A directly elected mayor would provide singular leadership in instructing them.

If the Brexit negotiations have taught us anything, it is that we have a place at the biggest tables around the world. We are not an outlier. We have attributes to offer and rewards to bestow. An onward looking approach is crucial to the future of Dublin and, if we are to compete with cities across Europe and globally, a strong champion and ambassador will be key. Dublin should have its mayor.

The specific role and powers of mayors should be fully debated and fleshed out, with public consultation building on previous work. Specific powers are crucial to creating a strong position and attracting high-calibre civic-minded people to the post. We suggest potential powers include those of the chief executive of the local authority. The current county manager's role would be changed into that of a secretary general. The mayor should be head of the council cabinet, leading the agenda for the council. He or she should be chief ambassador for the locality at home and abroad. He or she should be a member of the transport authority in regional areas, while sitting mayors should be head of the transport authorities in their areas. The mayor should be directly accountable to an independent planning regulator. This blend of powers and responsibilities would ensure a dynamic executive that would lead from the front and be fully accountable to local people for decisions made locally. It would rebalance power away from unelected bureaucracy and towards elected officials of the people. There is a place for this role across the country and it is time for us to consider it. It is of great importance.

As the Minister of State is aware, there are mayors in our area of Carlow-Kilkenny, where I was once a councillor. Cities such as Dublin, Limerick and Cork have such large populations that they require a full-time mayor. It boils down to ensuring that when this happens and it must, proper funding is in place to ensure costs are met and that there is adequate staffing.

I thank the Minister of State for his very good speech but he needs to look at the overall picture. Mayors play a major role and having a full-time mayor is of great importance. However, the bigger picture which the Minister of State must address and on which he must revert to us is the role of councillors. Having directly elected mayors is only a start on what we need to achieve for the Irish people. This is about our communities, the people we represent. Small

changes can make a big difference to people in the community. It is a great honour to represent one's community, whether as a councillor or mayor, and be in a position to make a difference in people's lives.

We need every local authority in the country to work together on this issue. Joined-up thinking is the only way forward because it can be very confusing and take a significant amount of time to deal with various agencies that do not know what the others are doing. One may need to phone one organisation to find out what organisation one should contact next.

Overall, the Bill proposes a very good scheme. We need directly elected mayors. We also need to look at the bigger picture and I know that the Minister of State will do so. I thank him for addressing the Seanad.

Senator Victor Boyhan: I welcome the Minister of State to the House once again. He is attempting to embark on major local government reform, which is his area of responsibility. The Taoiseach has tasked him with doing so and leading from the front in that regard. He is well able and motivated to so do.

The Minister of State addressed the Dáil on Thursday, 24 January 2019 and set out more or less the same points he has made today. I took the liberty of downloading his statement on that occasion, a copy of which I circulated to every councillor in the country. I make no apologies for doing so. I am very interested in local government and came to the Seanad to specialise in it. Housing, planning and local government are the areas on which I focus. As the Minister of State is aware, I am an exceptionally active member of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government. I received a mixed response to my distribution of the statement. The biggest response was from members of Fine Gael, particularly Dublin representatives, which was very interesting, although I know some of them, which may partly explain it. They expressed many reservations. No respondent from the Minister of State's party was in favour of his plans. Some members of the Labour Party stated they required further time to come to a decision on the wisdom of having directly elected mayors. What was the reason for such a response?

I am not against having directly elected mayors. There are two mayors of London who have different functions. There are many models for directly elected mayors such as in Barcelona and other cities. The problem is that this only addresses one element of local government reform, much to the frustration and annoyance of local councillors. The Minister of State might bear in mind that it is critically important at the very early stages of this proposed legislation to set up regional meetings with councillors to talk through the proposal with them because if they do not buy into it, it will not happen. However, if the Minister of State can get them on board, things would go far more smoothly. Local government reform is a complex issue touching on the role, functions and remuneration of councillors, as well the respect afforded to them as professional county councillors. All of these issues feed into the feeling of frustration among councillors. The Minister of State's proposals may fall due to the frustration, vexation and anger about the defined role of elected county councillors rather than because of opposition to having directly elected mayors. The Minister of State and I know that many of them will be seeking re-election and that this is not an easy task. It is a hard job to get elected in one's community. It is a great honour but it is a hard task. I am keen to make that point.

I accept and acknowledge that this is in the programme for Government and that the Minister of State is delivering on the programme for Government. I know that it may be seen as

something of a setback in respect of Galway. Perhaps the Minister of State will touch on his intentions with regard to Galway city and county. I understand he proposes to bring forward a separate Bill for Galway. He might share that information with us.

What am I saying? I took the time to look at Owen Keegan. He has been an exceptionally good county manager and is now in Dublin City Council. He has made some public commentary on the question of mayor. He asked about the functions and proper devolved powers. Who are they coming from and who are they going to? He is respected by Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government officials, as well as by many councils throughout the country. He was my county manager in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council at one stage. Are county managers, as we now know them, chief executives? What about those in the County and City Management Association? Are representative bodies such as the CCMA buying into this? I think there is a potential opportunity for balance between a chief executive and a mayor. I am not in favour of giving all powers to a mayor but it is important that we have leadership in terms of elected leaders on the council. I also believe the issue of executive functions arises. The Minister of State referred to the posts of Secretary General and the Minister in his Department. I think there is synergy and balance between the two. To be fair to chief executives, they get a great deal of bad stick. I have made some commentary on them too. I am going to put my hand up and say as much. Despite this, I think they have served us well on the whole. Chief executives have served themselves well.

The Minister of State also needs to look at his track record in government. His party has been in government for seven years. We need to look at the powers and functions. We must also ask whether the Government is committed to devolving powers in a range of areas, including tourism and transport. I know that it has done much in terms of enterprise in the community. We have an issue in this area. This has to be one part of a package of reforms for local government. That is important.

If we are to have a plebiscite, the Government will have to bring people on board and set out for them the cost implications because there will be cost implications. That brings me back to the old chestnut of finance and the local property tax. People are frustrated about the local property tax. Some councils do not retain all of the local property tax. It is collected locally but distributed nationally. We have to link in all of that. How can we allow communities to keep the taxes that they generate locally? How can we subsidise, assist and prop up local authorities that cannot generate the local property tax? I recognise that this matter needs to be addressed too. If we are to have mayors, we must have finance, real power and real functions. It will not work if we shift the power from chief executives to mayors. It is a matter of the synergy between both. Between us, if we are imaginative enough, we can achieve a very clever balance.

Ultimately, in Waterford, Limerick and Cork we will have elected representatives on councils from all parties and none. They will either be for or against the idea. They will also be out batting and might suggest not providing for the mayor idea because it will cost more money or the cost will come from the local property tax and so on. In that case, the idea of mayors will be scuppered. The key message is for the Minister of State to go out to the cities. He should explain the plan to the relevant people and what the Department is doing. If the Minister of State wants to sell it on that basis, it might work. If he addresses the issues of councillor remuneration and how they are valued, I believe they will be on board with him.

It is an interesting dichotomy that the Minister of State is in, but it is important that we send a clear message. We must say we value county councillors and that we are going to talk to them

next before any plebiscite is held. The Minister of State should set up regional discussions with officials from the Department and explain the rationale behind it. He needs to bring on board these managers and chief executives because otherwise they are going to put the brakes on if they believe the Government will take powers from them.

I am in favour of the principle of having mayors. However, we need to be careful and clearly define their powers and functions. I sincerely and genuinely wish the Minister of State well. The real issue, however, is finance. It is about who we are taking the powers from and who we are giving them to.

Senator Paudie Coffey: This is an interesting discussion. We must always welcome where there is an effort to reform or evaluate the performance of any organisation, especially local authorities. In a democratic country local authorities are nearest to the citizen in delivering local services, democracy and representation. The idea of a directly elected mayor bodes well and is something that interests me greatly. However, the practicality of electing a mayor directly and having clearly defined responsibilities and roles might not be as easy as we thought at first. Most of us in this House have served on local authorities and are very proud of what our elected councillors do. However, in recent years there has been an increased level of frustration. Councillors feel the councils are becoming regulators and that they are just rubber-stamping development plans, budgets or strategies, rather than wielding real power to effect change in their local communities. That is a cause for concern. The Minister of State is taking action to try to address that issue by rebalancing powers in favour of the elected council and a directly elected mayor. It is a genuine attempt to rebalance powers in the local authority system.

Having said that, I still have reservations. We are only four months out from the local elections and four months from the plebiscite. I recognise that Senator Boyhan has circulated the Minister of State's speech to councillors around the country. It is important that councillors and representative organisations be consulted on this issue; they will provide interesting feedback. I am sure there is also interesting feedback to be had from academics in the Institute of Public Administration, which looks at other countries and describes how successful directly elected mayors can be.

I have a concern about how this will actually work. There is either someone in authority at the top of the local government system - the CEO or the directly elected mayor - and I have a concern about who will call the shots. Who is accountable when things go right and when they go wrong? The system we have in place sees the CEO exercising a lot of power. Luckily, Ireland has many excellent CEOs. In Waterford City and County Council Mr. Michael Walsh is seen as a very progressive CEO who is not afraid to take risks and gets on with things. That has been recognised and he has achieved a lot with that approach. However, in other local authorities there are CEOs who may not be performing as well, but we are stuck with them. How accountable are they? The elected members of those councils can be exasperated in dealing with those CEOs. If we had directly elected mayors with real power and authority they would be accountable. If they are doing a bad job they have to stand up at the end of a five-year term and report progress or otherwise and the electorate will hold them accountable. If they are doing a good job it will be recognised and they may be re-elected and if they are doing a poor job I am sure they will be turfed out, with any councillor not doing a good job either.

I recognise the need for reform and to rebalance power to those who are elected. We can do more in terms of the powers of councillors, but that is for another day. The Minister of State wants to hear views on directly elected mayors. I can speak about Waterford best because that

is where I am from. We need elections, not just for mayors for cities but rather cities and counties. Waterford has a city and it is a very rural county, as the Minister of State knows. It is a coastal county and so faces many maritime issues. It also has issues with mountains. This is not just about urban life and how a mayor would address how a city develops. In this case we are talking about an entire county. The responsibilities and powers also have to be taken into account. In an ideal world the mayor would have all of the power. This is the case in other countries. This is a first step and a series of steps might be required to get to that stage. If cities and counties are to develop in a coherent, strategic way, a mayor should have an input into issues such as public transport and policing strategies. However, the system we have in place in Ireland is more dispersed and we have many organisations with responsibility for those areas. It will take a series of steps to get to that point. I understand and respect this but feel that if we are going to go with a plebiscite in four months time we have to inform the electorate on what it is actually voting on, in a similar way to referendums. We need to be careful not to confuse the electorate. The electorate in Waterford city and county is confused enough because we have a city and county mayor and a metropolitan mayor, both of whom often turn up at events, causing confusion even among hosting organisations that welcome and invite them. They wonder who the real mayor is and who the guy or girl with the top status is. We need to bring more clarity to that issue and perhaps this is an opportunity to do so.

As the Minister of State mentioned, a relationship similar to that between a Minister and the Secretary General of the relevant Department is the best bet. Electors may not understand that relationship but, as policymakers and politicians, we possibly understand it well. Our electors will not understand it, however, and we need clearer, concise language that citizens will understand about who the boss is and what the mayor does and is responsible for. For example, in conjunction with the elected council, will he or she be responsible for the council's budget and how it is spent? He or she will not be responsible for human resources and staffing, which is fair enough, and the Minister of State said the mayor will not be responsible for planning, but I have a different view in that regard.

CEOs and planners are currently responsible for planning and the individual decisions on planning applications, which I accept, but councillors are responsible for adopting the county development plans. To have authority, the mayor should have some power to plan the direction a city or county will take. Perhaps this is an example of the synergies to which Senator Boyhan referred, where there is a healthy tension among the CEO, the staff, the elected members and the mayor. There are examples to be found throughout the country where it is not always the case that the councillor has got it wrong but rather the planning staff in Departments can get it wrong. We need a healthy balance in that regard and a mayor should have some power to plan for the city and county. While it might not be a specific power to make decisions on planning applications, which I respect, the mayor should have a strong say on the direction, strategy and coherence of a development plan for a city and county if he or she is to be the respected person of authority with the power that is aspired to.

We have a way to go but I welcome the Minister of State's initiative. It is easy to leave matters alone and I acknowledge that he is not doing that but instead is trying to reform, evaluate and make matters better by giving more power and accountability to those democratically elected, for which he should be supported. Time might not be on his side but there is scope for more consultation and feedback from those already elected on how they feel about their current powers and how they could be improved. Let us learn from policymakers, councillors and academics. I hope the Government will produce a plebiscite that engages the public because

it is important we do so rather than receiving only a half response to the question of whether there should be directly elected mayors. I believe there should be, although the process needs to be developed a little more, and perhaps this is the first step. I wish the Minister of State well in that endeavour.

Senator Fintan Warfield: I welcome the Minister of State and thank him for his constructive engagement on the issue. As he will know, Sinn Féin supports the concept of directly elected mayors. We are all on the same page on a number of issues with the implementation of the proposal such as whether mayors should assume powers from the chief executives, managers and agencies rather than from councillors elected in their own right to democratise local government. We are concerned that we have yet to see details of the exact powers to be transferred, as the Minister of State identified, or of what powers a directly elected mayor will have. Plebiscites in counties Cork, Limerick and Waterford are 16 weeks away, but if they are to be supported, the electorate, local authorities and elected representatives need further details of on what they are voting. Otherwise, it could follow the line that Brexit has taken, where there will be a vote on an issue without knowing exactly what is being voted on. We will have a number of public votes on that day and the people in Cork, Limerick and Waterford will not only be voting on the plebiscite but also in two referenda and two elections. As much information as possible that can be furnished will give the proposals the best chance of being passed and reduce the chances of the debate spiralling around misinformation and distortion of the facts.

I have spoken previously in this House about the virtues of directly elected mayors in Britain and some of the initiatives they are able to undertake. One of these initiatives is the night czar, working to keep the capital safe, in the Mayor of London's office. This was created in response to a series of closures of night-time industries in Britain and late-night venues being closed in London. The industry is worth around €60 billion to the economy. There is a similar situation in Dublin and other Irish cities. I am sure such an initiative would enhance this city, the night-life industries and the culture of the night. Having an office spread across all four local authorities in Dublin would strongly improve how we strategically plan and have joint policies with all local authorities, particularly as we re-imagine Dublin, in terms of Dublin-wide plans for green spaces, cycling infrastructure and cultural spaces. Sometimes these conversations and joined-up thinking can get lost in bureaucracy and we had that conversation here previously.

I understand from the Minister of State's speech that the Department is prioritising the Government's instruction to produce more detailed proposals for plebiscites, the questions to be put to the electorate and the specific powers of mayors. The Minister of State goes on to state these detailed proposals, including analysis of the cost involved, would be submitted to the Government in the coming weeks. Will those details be made public and will they inform the debate? We have submitted our views and I wonder if those details will be made public. I look forward to engaging with the Minister of State on the issue and hope he will return to the House to debate the matter further.

Sinn Féin will support the concept of directly elected mayors but let me emphasise that the power must come down and not come from councillors or existing powers that lie with local authorities. Transport is a major issue and the powers can come from the agencies such as the NTA. We are seeing the roll out of the Go Ahead buses. It is absolutely bizarre that the existing operator, Dublin Bus, did not win those contracts. A mayor would have an important role in exercising the will of the people on these issues.

Senator Maria Byrne: I welcome the Minister of State and congratulate him on bringing

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this issue back to the House. There have been many attempts during the years to do this, but nothing really happened. A Green Paper was published on which there was much discussion but it did not proceed to becoming a White Paper.

As a former Mayor of Limerick city, which I had the honour and privilege to serve from 2010 to 2011, I engaged with people from all communities and found it a wonderful experience. As mayor, one is representing all of Limerick, the city as well as rural areas.

Dr. David Sweeting from Bristol University has written a book entitled, *Directly Elected Mayors in Urban Governance: Impact and Practice*, and in a recent article stated directly elected mayors were portrayed as being more visible, more accountable, more legitimate and more powerful than any sort of local leader. That is very true. I know from my own experience that people from all sections of society look to the mayor as being the leader and that they are looking to the mayor for support and guidance. Certainly I know this from visiting communities and groups across sports and cultural organisations and other interested parties. During my term of office as Mayor, one had the Mayor of Limerick city and the cathaoirleach of the county. Limerick has an amalgamated local authority.

When the then Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, John Gormley, proposed to amalgamate the city and county councils, I led a protest against it. Now, however, I believe it is the best thing that ever happened in Limerick. Even in terms of Limerick being the economic driver for the mid-west, the performance indicators show that it has the second fastest growing economy and it is because the administration is talking as one unit. A directed elected mayor would certainly bring that into being.

I have a reservation about the populist vote. The candidate would need some local authority experience. When someone serves as mayor, it definitely stands to the candidate that he or she has served on a local authority and the experience of what people are looking for. Countries such as the USA, Germany and the UK, our nearest neighbour, have directly elected mayors. I would support a five-year term because from my experience, one year is not long enough. One is only into the job and getting things done when one is out the door again.

I have learned that people want consistency, as they are disappointed to have to approach the next candidate when one is coming to the end of one's term. It is positive that the Minister of State is speaking in terms of having a plebiscite for the city areas. When people look to the drivers of the regions - I use Limerick as an example for the mid-west - Cork is driving the south and then one has Dublin. Dublin is not competing with the other cities in Ireland, rather it is competing with capital cities such as London and Paris. We have to be able to compete with our counterparts, be it on the European or national platform. We have to be able to deliver the same standard.

The powers of the mayor are very important to the position. Transport comes within the remit of the mayor. In other countries education and health come within the remit of the local authority. I accept that we have to start small and look at expanding the powers. However, the powers have to be given and while the CEO of the local authorities is the main person in charge, the position of mayor has to be developed into something more than a figurehead. While some mayors will put their weight behind things, others will not; therefore, it is important that the role of the CEO be defined if we are to have a directly elected mayor.

In Limerick we have a mayor who is mayor of the city and county and a mayor of the metro-

politan area. We have three other mayors, giving five mayors in total. That needs to be looked at. I know that Senator Coffey referred to the fact that both mayors may turn up. We had an issue with this for some time, but a solution was worked out in the local authority whereby only one mayor would be present. Should more than one mayor with his or her chain of office turn up, it can present a difficulty for the person hosting the event. That is an issue the Department can examine.

I have been wholeheartedly supportive of the idea of directly elected mayor since it was first mooted. I remain supportive of it. It is important to carry out a survey of former mayors and councillors to get their opinions, as well as a survey on the plebiscite. A previous speaker put it to us that one had to define exactly what was being put to the people and what that would entail. It is very important to create a clear picture. I thank Members.

Senator Kevin Humphreys: Regarding Senator Byrne's comments, I fundamentally disagree with restricting the candidacy of a mayor by requiring him or her to have local government experience. Going down the route of ruling people out is a slippery slope. The electorate makes its choice from the people who go forward and I would never agree with limiting people's choice in that regard.

I welcome the Minister of State. This is an exciting period. Whatever happens, he must ensure he gets the mayoral provision through. It has been played around with for a long time. It would nearly be better now just to get it than to get it 100% right. We can adapt and learn from experience. It is easy to criticise, but I hope to be constructive in my contributions.

People are discussing what powers the mayors will and will not have, but the first time London had a directly elected mayor, the position had very limited powers. It had a clear mandate from the people, however, and woe betide the official or Minister who does not listen to a mayor with such a democratic mandate. While I want to see mayors having real powers, I will probably not get overly exercised about them getting those powers the first time around. I am more anxious to succeed in establishing the post. It would be difficult for a CEO, a Minister or the head of the National Transport Authority not to listen to a directly elected mayor from Cork, Limerick or Waterford who had set out his or her vision for that city.

I am jealous that it is Cork, Limerick and Waterford. I was one of the councillors who campaigned for many years for a directly elected mayor of Dublin. I am disappointed that we will not get one now. Dublin is being hard done by. I apologise to the Chamber, but I feel passionately about my city and its four local authorities. The Minister of State asked where the boundary would be. It would be the GAA boundary. We support the same team. It is the four local authorities. That is what I would like to see as the boundary. It is a mixture of city and rural. There are still rural areas and a farming community left in County Dublin. I still believe a mayor can represent people like that without being tied to a single geographical electoral area. The mayor would be as important to the city centre as to Tallaght, Swords and Balbriggan, which are key areas of the city. This approach has been proved. Many have said that, if there were a directly elected mayor of Dublin, he or she would only worry about the city centre, but that has not happened in other cities. In the light of where the electorate lives, a mayor who only concentrated on the city centre would be a silly one because he or she would probably not be re-elected.

Dublin faces important climate change challenges in terms of transport and developing a carbon-neutral city. My good friend Councillor Dermot Lacey constantly points out that 56

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agencies deal with traffic in the Dublin area. Can that continue? Can there really be joined-up thinking in that situation? Regarding housing, a cross-city plan is required. Housing needs to be built on State lands and driven by a single voice.

We have seen the development of strategic development zones, SDZs, one of which - Poolbeg west - is in my constituency. We need a driver for it. It entails 3,500 homes, 900 of which should be social and affordable housing. We do not have a voice for it driving it now, though, and a deal done in 2017 regarding the 900 units has still not been delivered on. A mayor of Dublin would have that voice.

Cities are economic drivers and important to their regions. That is why Waterford, Cork and Limerick are as important as Dublin when it comes to mayors.

The Minister of State made some interesting points. It was difficult for him to deal with all of issues involved in a speech for which he was only given eight minutes. It is proposed that the elected mayors have a similar relationship with local authority chief executives as a Minister has with a Secretary General in a Department. The latter is also the gatekeeper for Government policy and can send a memo to the Cabinet on a change to it. I was fortunate enough to be the leader of the Labour Party group in the city alliance in Dublin City Council. We developed a five-year programme for Dublin city which was the council's policy. It was put to it to be voted on.

Deputy John Paul Phelan: Similar to the programme for Government.

Senator Kevin Humphreys: The chief executive of the local authority would have responsibility for the policy voted on by the elected councillors. The elected mayor would be responsible for delivering on the programme. That is how we should keep democratic control. The elected mayor would have to get his or her policy programme through the council chamber with support. This could see a driven policy.

On the corporate policy group, the Minister of State wants to see it share the various strategic planning committees. That is an interesting proposal. If it is to act as a mayor's cabinet, there has to be some relationship with the council in how the mayor appoints it. The cabinet could come from and be approved by the council chamber. Essentially, the mayor would select his or her cabinet from the elected councillors who would be approved by the council. That would keep a strong connection between the mayor and the elected councillors. There is a need to keep that bond. We need to examine and debate this issue in more detail with councillors as there may be problems and hiccups when one moves further into the detail.

On the holding of a plebiscite, the information will come from the Department to the local authorities which will, in turn, give it to the electorate. However, the local authorities have a skin in the game. Should we have a body similar to the Referendum Commission to give independent expert advice to the electorate? All local authority chief executive officers will also have a skin in the game and a particular viewpoint. It would be difficult for them to keep their independence. I would like to see some element of an independent commission in place.

I appeal to the Minister of State to fast-track the arrangements for Dublin. It faces many challenges which need to be dealt with on a citywide basis. We are in discussions on Metro-Link and BusConnects. These projects will affect people from Blanchardstown to Swords and from Swords to Tallaght. With those which involve investment and development, they need a citywide debate which should be led by a directly elected mayor. We are talking about moving

power back closer to the electorate. The development plan is an important element of local government which is in its ownership. However, with the changes to the height strategy for apartments, it has been taken away from local government. I am in favour of a height and density strategy, but it has to be done correctly, with a buy-in by citizens and councillors.

5 o'clock

Taking away the power from councillors is a very negative step, but I can understand it in many ways. However, if we look at the height and density strategy for the Poolbeg West development in south east Dublin, it was brought forward by local councillors and the local community and passed by the city council. It is high density and also has great height, at 12 to 16 storeys. It was brought through the democratic process much quicker. On more than 100 units breaching the development plan, again, the policy and power were taken from the council.

To those of them who are listening - I am sure this speech will be spread around - it must be said councillors also have a responsibility to exercise their reserved functions. I remember having an interesting discussion with the city manager when I became leader of the Labour Party group in the civic alliance. We announced to the manager that we were going to produce the budget, which is a reserved function. In the first year he was not very progressive, but in the second year he was much more progressive in actually engaging and assisting in producing the budget. It is a reserved function, as in the case of the development plan. Sometimes it can be very unpopular to take responsibility and exercise reserved functions. The sale of land is a reserved function. Too often - I say this with a lot of experience of local government - giving a small sum of money to a councillor to stay quiet sometimes deflects from the bigger picture. The discretionary funding of €4,000 or €5,000 individual councillors receive does not always serve the greater public as well as lumping funding together. From the late spring many local authorities will start to develop their budgetary processes. I urge councillors in those local authorities, especially in those councils that will be newly elected, to look at their reserved functions and actually exercise them. There is an amount of powers that can be brought closer to the electorate. Councillors should make the decisions on where money should be spent because it is a reserved function.

As I said at the beginning, I envy the Minister of State. This could be a turning point in local government. Above all, I ask him to not let anyone deflect him and ensure this legislation goes through in a timely manner. I will support the suggestions that I think are worthy and push my party to support them.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Phelan, who has put a considerable amount of work into this issue. I want to get into the substantive issue. This is very much democracy at work. The people of Limerick and in the other cities will decide for themselves if they want to have a directly elected mayor. It is critical that what is put to the people is something they believe is valid and credible and has not been rushed. Limerick City Council and Limerick County Council were amalgamated some time ago. One of the unintended consequences initially was that there were two mayors. That issue had not been looked at. It so happened that in the first year both mayors had the same surname, which caused a great degree of confusion. It is very important that what is put in place works.

The Minister of State stated the proposed office of directly elected mayor should help to bridge the gap. He needs to define what he means by "bridge the gap." What position will the mayor occupy? What powers will he or she have? What powers will be reallocated from the

county manager or the CEO? The chamber must be left intact in respect of the reserved functions of councillors. What new powers will the mayor have? I listened to Senator Humphreys who mentioned that the mayor would be akin to a Minister. Every time a Secretary General comes before the Committee of Public Accounts and we ask him or her a question, he or she answers it by stating it is a matter of policy or a matter for the Government. If the mayor is to be the equivalent of a Minister, who will decide on policy? That is the critical point. There are areas where I think having a mayor would be extremely important. For instance, there is a general view among councillors that the change in powers has moved in one direction, away from them and towards the CEO. How then will we ensure we define the role of mayor clearly? The role of CEO is clearly defined, as is the interaction between the mayor and the CEO. The role of the chamber and its members is also clearly defined. I am assuming that, if the people of Limerick decide to opt to have a directly elected mayor, there will be an increase in the number of members from 40 to 41. Will the CEO be a member of Limerick City and County Council? He or she will sit on the council-----

Deputy John Paul Phelan: The mayor, not the CEO.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: I am sorry. Will the mayor be a member of Limerick City and County Council?

Deputy John Paul Phelan: Yes.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: The membership will increase to 41. Will the mayor have a vote to play? Will he or she have the same standing in votes as other members in the chamber? These are all matters where the devil will be in the detail.

The Minister of State spoke about a recall mechanism. It will have to be clearly defined and understood by the public. In my experience, unless members of the public understand how something will work in practice, in many cases, they will say "No" based on the principle of if in doubt, leave it out. That is an issue of great importance.

The idea of having strategic policy committees could be a good one. I was elected to the council when strategic policy committees were in their infancy in 2004. By and large, they did not work as they were seen as talking shops by many of their members, but they have evolved into something different and are now more substantive. If they are to be set up as sub-cabinet groups, they must have powers and must be able to feed into policy. The idea of having a programme for a council term is a very good one and it would work in practice. In addition, it is important that whatever the Minister of State is proposing be put to the people. The legislation is in place and the overarching aspect at which we are looking is the directly elected mayor.

The public is normally ahead of the politicians. It will ask how the Bill is going to work in practice and what exactly the mayor will do. It will certainly say "No" if it gets any whiff that it will be nothing more than a ceremonial role.

I am also conscious that there are 40 directly elected councillors on Limerick City and County Council and their powers must be protected and enhanced. That is key. How can we come up with such a system? The Minister of State spoke about reserved functions and stated planning functions would be retained within the executive. When it comes to housing, however, no one is infallible. To be honest, we have seen proposals for housing projects about which questions have to be asked about whoever thought about building them in a particular location. People have to be held accountable. We can state that in the political system we are

very much held to account. It is very important, therefore, that we examine what works in other jurisdictions. Not so long ago we were part of a delegation to Germany where we studied the public banking system. In Heidelberg there is a directly elected mayor whose role is separate from that of the councillors, but he does attend meetings. There has to be accountability-----

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): The Senator is one minute over time.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: Okay. I welcome this. It is very important that the people of Limerick have a directly elected mayor but, as the public will not take the decision lightly, the roles of the new mayor and CEO must be clear and unambiguous, as must be the new powers the new mayor will have. The proposals must be rolled out to the public in a way that is separate from the local authority in order that people can perceive the role as being completely independent. A directly elected mayor could substantially enhance Limerick city with regard to investment abroad and how the public interacts with the local authority.

When does the Minister of State expect to finalise the proposals? The sooner they are in the public domain the more they can be perused in order that when it comes to the plebiscite, the public will be familiar and happy with them and people will be able to make a very clear decision on something that they know will do what it says on tin. We will then have a directly elected mayor to represent the people of Limerick in the best possible way.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I welcome the Minister of State and thank him for returning to the House. It is disappointing that the number of Senators participating in the debate is so small, given its importance. I am an unapologetic supporter of the newly created position of directly elected mayor and will be a very strong advocate for it. I welcome the debate and the concept. I have met directly elected mayors in the UK and the US.

I hope the Irish people, in particular the people of Cork, will affirm the commitment in the programme for Government by voting for this proposal in May. This will be the most important plebiscite the people will face in making their decisions on the future of local government and its structures. Some Members have outlined questions that must be addressed. It is important that we put in place a series of information meetings as part of the advancement of the case. I invite the Minister of State to Cork to engage in this process. I do not do so in an adversarial way but to take the points outlined by Senators Kieran O'Donnell and Byrne in order that we can bring people with us.

This is an exciting time for local government and cities, including Cork. We need to look at the directly elected mayor's role, functions, powers, staffing and resources in tandem with the role of the council, existing county and city managers and the director of services. This is about the empowerment of local government. We must avoid vagueness and ambiguity as part of our campaign for the plebiscite. We must bring people with us. We must inform and educate them and give them all of the information they will seek from us. I hope we will engage in a regional meeting approach.

This is about the future vision of cities. It is about giving a mandate to a political leader to take this vision and create new vibrant cities as part of Project Ireland 2040. In tandem with this, we can allow elected mayors, with the chief executive, to have a voice and leadership role. The Minister of State made reference to the role being akin to the Secretary General of a Department. I welcome this. We must also ensure members of the council are not lost in the transition and that they have roles to play in local government. This is an important time and I

an ambitious for the role to be cultivated and created.

I am a very proud member of my political party and have never been afraid to come up with ideas to ensure we create alternatives to Dublin in the case of Cork. As a Corkonian, I am very passionate about Cork. Through Project Ireland 2040, the Government has given an imprimatur to the regions to grow and develop and be that counterfoil, despite the political protestations and posturing of some members of the Opposition. It is incumbent on us to develop the role to be the driver and creator of a new modern dynamic local government structure.

In some way, the challenges we face today are no different from when we began local government but there are also new challenges in having carbon neutral cities, transport and housing. As the uachtarán of Cumann Lúthchleas Gael stated in his address today, it is also about ensuring we have green spaces for recreation and parks in cities. It is about saying to those who are tempted to oppose it that we can win them over by the strength of our argument. It is about being positive. It is about speaking to some councillors who perhaps are sceptical and have vague notions about what the role is. It is also about putting in place the building block to create this platform for cities.

Senator Humphreys is correct that we must avoid putting in place restrictions but I hope we do not go down the road of celebrity candidates thinking they can be the chief executive of a city. This is the most important position we are creating in local government and civic life because it is about the people who will be represented. It is about the cities and regions in question. It is also about the future. I know from speaking to mayors of small US cities that there is a competitive element of attracting finance and jobs. We must define the role. We must create the argument for it and I believe the Minister of State can do this. This debate is the beginning of the journey. I will work with the Minister of State in campaigning for the position of directly elected mayor of the city of Cork. It is necessary and would play a pivotal role in making Cork the transformative place it is on the cusp of being.

I congratulate the Minister of State and thank him for his courtesy regarding the boundary arrangements for Cork. I hope we will not have a lacuna in the period between passing the legislation in that regard and its enactment because we must get it right. We cannot afford to fail in the biggest and most pronounced boundary change in the history of the country. It will involve staffing, resourcing and meeting the expectations of residents.

Senator Victor Boyhan: We were speaking about mayors, not boundary changes.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I thank the eight Senators who contributed. I also thank the business committee of the Seanad for arranging to have the debate today. The reason for having this discussion now is that I am conscious that the Government will make a decision on this issue within the next two weeks and we want to hear what Senators have to say and their suggestions. Probably for the best of reasons, many of the speakers want me to outline to the House more specific proposals. The proposals must go to the Cabinet first. The purpose of this debate is to get the views of Senators. Some gave views, while others did not. It is important that everyone have the opportunity to be heard. As Senator Murnane O'Connor said, it was a privilege to be here with the president of the GAA. It is a privilege to be here with me also.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: The Minister of State is my neighbour.

Deputy John Paul Phelan: I will not refer to each person who raised the issue of the role

of councillors and the bigger picture. It is absolutely correct. It has always been the way that, when it comes to the day of local and European elections, councillors and their foot soldiers do the campaigning. They have also campaigned for the European elections. Other votes will be held on the day of the elections in May.

I reiterate unambiguously that we are not proposing the removal of any of the existing reserved functions of councillors. Ms Moorhead is conducting another piece of work about extra remuneration and additional functions for local authority members and I do not want to pre-empt the outcome of that work. I am conscious of the point made by Senator Humphreys that we have to start the ball rolling somewhere. If we were to wait for every piece to fall into place, nothing would move in the area of directly elected mayors for quite some time. People in Cork city, Waterford city and county and Limerick city and county are being asked whether they want to have a directly elected mayor. The Government will make its decisions in the coming weeks on the exact parameters of the role and the issues of costs, remuneration for the people elected and the staffing supports which Senators raised in their contributions.

Senator Murnane O'Connor spoke about the Dublin issue. I would have liked for Dublin to be in the first round, but there is a significant complicating factor in Dublin in that there are four local authorities. It is interesting that, in both this and the other House, the Members who have raised the issue of why Dublin is not included have not suggested a single idea as to how a directly elected mayor would fit in with the four existing local authorities in the capital. That is a difficult chestnut to crack, but the Dublin assembly will be tasked with doing so. The assembly will include the voices of elected representatives, both local and national.

I am glad that Senator Boyhan has circulated my statement. He is nothing if not meticulous in his circulation of material among members of local authorities.

Senator Victor Boyhan: They appreciate it.

Deputy John Paul Phelan: They do and they also raise the matter with me. I emphasise the Senator's point that this is one piece of a reform package. It is a bit like what happened during the mergers in Waterford, Limerick and Tipperary. The first thing to be done was the appointment of a joint chief executive who drove the process. There is a major gap in the local authority structure that is not really there in any other comparable place in the world. Much of the power rests with the executive and little with the people who are elected. The fundamental point of this measure is to fundamentally address that issue by effectively making the roles of what used to be known as county manager and city manager directly elected positions. The chief executive would continue to run the administration, but the directly elected mayor would be the person responsible for the political side, as well as being the face of the local authority. He or she would be responsible for the political decisions and policy positions of the authority.

Senator Boyhan also spoke about remuneration and other matters. From the interim report produced by Ms Moorhead, it was fairly clear where her thoughts were headed with regard to the underpayment of local authority members for the work they did and the hours they put in. Again, however, I cannot pre-empt what the final report will state.

I can see how this measure could be viewed as an attack on chief executives of local authorities and county managers, but it is not. For the most part, chief executives and county managers have been exemplary public servants across the country. This is an absolute acknowledgement that one either believes in democracy or one does not. For this reason, I am slightly in disagree-

ment with Deputy Jan O’Sullivan and Senator Maria Byrne about celebrity-type candidates. I do not want to see a celebrity-type candidate elected anywhere unless he or she is qualified and able to do the job. Not all celebrities are unqualified for the role. We cannot exclude people from running for elected office on the basis that they were sportspersons or anything else in a previous life. Ultimately, the people will make the call as to who their directly elected mayor will be after individuals have decided to put themselves forward for the role. I am sure parties will also contest the elections and run candidates.

In respect of the meeting with the County and City Management Association, CCMA, scheduled for the near future, I have already had some preliminary discussions with the councillor representative groups on the issue. Much like the views expressed in the Seanad today, their views have been broadly supportive but they have inquired about the parameters of the role. I do not want to presuppose what the issues of concern to the CCMA might be, but we will certainly try to ensure a balance is struck.

The matter of the local property tax, LPT, is a two-handed reel between the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Department of Finance. The work is nearly completed from the point of view of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. I am sure Senator Boyhan will continue to raise the matter with the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform. People need certainty. When I say “people” I do not necessarily mean only the public. Local authority members and people who hold positions in local government also need that certainty. Several speakers said the real issues were finance and the functions and costs of the role. I agree absolutely. Once the Government has made its decision, I will have no problem coming back to the House again.

Senator Coffey also supported the idea that we were proposing in principle but had issues with the practicalities of how it would work. We have always had an issue in Ireland in that representative groups, including those representing councillors and county managers, are not always the first people seeking reform of the system. I suppose it is the natural shape of the relationship in local government for so long. Some consultation has taken place and more will take place. The Senator asked whether the mayor or chief executive will call the shots. The mayor will call the shots because this is about injecting a severe dose of democratic accountability into local government at the executive level. We already have it at the reserved level, that is, among local authority members.

More will be done on the issue of councillors’ powers when Ms Moorhead’s work is completed because there is an appetite in government for ensuring councillors have more powers. Senator Humphreys said there were local authority members who did not want to exercise their powers. Drawing up the budget and development plans are the most substantive powers available to them. Some local authorities get deeper into the nitty-gritty of the drafting and drawing up of them than others. If one thinks back to the old local authority structure, there was a county agricultural committee, a county education committee and a county health committee. All of those functions have been removed over the years, not by any one Government but by many Governments over decades. Many of those decisions were made because difficult issues were not dealt with at local level. Some of it was done under the headings of saving costs or of benefiting from economies of scale when certain functions are performed at a more central or regional level. We all know that has not worked particularly well in certain areas. I am all in favour of more devolution but, again, we will see what emerges in Ms Moorhead’s report in terms of how much more power can be given back. My position on this issue is that any function that can be performed as efficiently and cost-effectively or more so at local level than at

a higher level should be performed by the local authority in the future. I will not draw a line under devolving anything that can be done as or more efficiently at local government level.

Senator Warfield also supported the concept but spoke about a lack of specifics. I cannot be too specific. This was a discussion for Members to give their suggestions. The Senator is absolutely right in one point he raised, which was completely different from those of everyone else. Holding two elections, two referendums and plebiscites on the same day will mean that we will have to be very clear with the people in the three local authority areas on what that fifth ballot paper is about. As practising politicians, we all know about the blank ballot papers that sometimes appear in ballot boxes because people did not know that there was to be a referendum or a plebiscite on a certain issue. People in the particular areas in which the plebiscites will be held will go in to vote for their local councillor or whatever else and suddenly find that they have been given five ballot papers. The costs associated with the role and what it will entail will, absolutely, be made public. I am sure this will be part of the campaign locally.

Senator Humphreys and others spoke about the roles of various Government agencies and other authorities to which we have devolved functions over the years, be it the National Transport Authority or others. The directly elected head of local government must have a clear role in transport and other functions that have been given to State bodies and agencies. How precise this will be is a decision facing the Government in the next few weeks. It would be pointless, as Senator Kieran O'Donnell said, if this role was just a figurehead. People would not vote for it. It has to be one with real powers.

Senator Byrne spoke about her support for the measure and how it did not matter if the person was rural or city based. She is right in that regard. Deputies in the other House becried and gave out about the prospect that the directly elected mayor of Limerick might come from outside Limerick city. Again, that is a matter for the public and it would be the same in Waterford. Off the top of my head, I do not know the population breakdown between Limerick city and county but in Waterford city and county there is probably a slightly larger rural population. If one includes the Tramore end of the county, it is probably more evenly balanced between city and county. It will be a matter for the people to vote for who they think is the best person. Reference was made to the success in Limerick of the merger, which had opponents at the time but which has worked out well for the city and the county.

Senator Byrne also spoke about the importance of the plebiscite route because if the people say they want the particular role it gives a democratic mandate to the person elected. I feel that too. The Senator is correct in her comments about the five mayors in Limerick. I believe a mayor should only be from an urban centre or a unified local authority. There is an idea across the country that in municipal districts with no significant urban centre the chairperson of that area is a mayor. Again, it is a matter for the local authorities to determine, but the Custom House may have to revisit this issue because it leads to confusion among the public.

I have referred to some of Senator Humphreys's comments. He spoke about the need to ensure everybody could run for the position and that there would be no artificial hurdles. I agree fully with this principle. The more I have debated this matter over two days in the Dáil and the Seanad the more I am convinced that rather than go to the public with the big bang we need to have a specific list which might be a short list of functions the directly elected mayor would have at first and have a longer list indicating where the role might go. One of the things that came out from the process in Cork was that the Cork local authorities performed 400 functions. Trying to explain this to the public would be difficult, whereas if one identified the ten or 12

key policy areas where the transfer of responsibility is wanted from day one, the list can grow. That is what happened in every other jurisdiction at which I have looked. It is one thing I have learned from the discussion in both Houses in the last week of sittings.

Reference was made to the Civic Alliance document. I do not see any reason. I want to consider a move towards a system of local government that would have more similarity with how national politics works in the sense that as well as getting more powers, there would be more responsibility accepted at local level. Senator Humphreys spoke about what was effectively a programme for government for the Dublin city local authority. I believe this is what will come out of these measures.

On the query about fast-tracking Dublin, if the Dublin assembly can complete its work this year it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that a directly elected mayor might emerge in Dublin as quickly as in the other areas. As I said, the Department of the Taoiseach is leading on this issue. I am pushing them as much as I can to ensure the assembly meets. Unlike the Constitutional Convention, it will not go on for months. A weekend or two could see a lot of the work done on those matters.

A Senator asked about how the new cabinet system would be appointed. It is important that the democratic will of the people be represented. We have a block system at local authority level where positions are filled and I believe that rather than have a confrontational style of local government straight off the bat the different groupings should be represented in those leadership positions as the lead on housing, planning or transport, for example, in each local authority area. That would be my preference but I am sure others may have different views.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell was correct when he said it was important that what was put to the people was valid and credible, not rushed. It is my intention to have a series of town hall meetings. I would consider it necessary to have one in Limerick city and one somewhere in the west of the county. The same applies to Waterford. It is slightly different in Cork where it is just the city area. Senator Lombard might guide me in this: do we need to have such a meeting on both the north and south sides of the city? City Hall in Cork is probably the place to have it, but further to that it will be an intensely local campaign. The local media outlets in Limerick, Cork and Waterford will need to be used to the maximum to explain what it is people will be faced with when they enter the polling booth in May this year.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell asked who would decide on policy and if it would be the executive or the mayor. The mayor and the council will decide on policy, not the executive. The general view of the council is that powers have gone one way. Exactly and I hope this is the start of a process that will see a reversal of that one-way traffic in different policy areas of local government for 30 years. The mayor will be a member of the local council, as things stand, and will have a regular vote with the other councillors on the budget or the development plan, for example. Members have referred to celebrity candidates, but if a candidate for the role of directly elected mayor wishes to run in a ward or an electoral area it would be very much open to him or her to do so. The powers of councillors are protected. The Senator also asked when it would be finalised. It is our intention that it be finalised within the next two weeks and that we will have that public process.

Senator Buttimer expressed his disappointment at the low turnout of Senators to debate this matter. He referred to a series of information meetings, with which I agree absolutely. In the first instance, it would probably be essential for me to go to the city council in Cork and the lo-

cal authorities in Limerick and Waterford to talk with the councillors first and perhaps have the public meeting on the same night in those areas. I have no problem with doing this.

The only opposition expressed in the Dáil Chamber was from Deputy Wallace. We are neighbours and I went to school with some of his family in New Ross, County Wexford. He gave us the example of H'Angus the Monkey, the Hartlepool United soccer team mascot in the UK. The mascot was elected as the mayor of Hartlepool on five successive occasions. I wish, however, to correct the record; the mascot was not a directly elected mayor with executive powers. H'Angus the Monkey did not get to influence policy decisions in Hartlepool in the same way I envisage the directly elected mayors doing across the country. In my view, the head of every local authority should ultimately be directly elected, whether it is in Kilkenny County Council, Leitrim County Council or Roscommon County Council. One can never have too much democracy. Currently, we have democratic accountability for the lowest rung of local government, the councillor, but we have none for the highest rung. This is an attempt to redress that imbalance.

Acting Chairman (Senator Frank Feighan): I thank the Minister of State.

When is it proposed to sit again?

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: At 10.30 a.m. tomorrow.

The Seanad adjourned at 5.40 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 30 January 2019.