



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

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

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SEANAD ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 5 Samhain 2019

Tuesday, 5 November 2019

Chuaigh an Leas-Chathaoirleach i gceannas ar 2.30 p.m.

Machnamh agus Paidir.
Reflection and Prayer.

Gnó an tSeanaid - Business of Seanad

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

The need for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to make a statement on the planned closure of ParentStop support services in County Donegal.

I have also received notice from Senator Jerry Buttimer of the following matter:

The need for the Minister of State with special responsibility for financial services and insurance to make a statement on his engagement with Insurance Ireland in relation to the traders affected by the recent fire in Douglas Village Shopping Centre, Cork.

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

The need for the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection to make a statement on use of the free travel scheme by people with disabilities accessing disability services in rural areas.

I have also received notice from Senator Victor Boyhan of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to make a statement on the establishment of a dedicated Irish wool forum to address the continuous decline in the industry.

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

The need for the Minister for Health to provide an update on the appointment of a sar-

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coma specialist for St. Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin.

I have also received notice from Senator Rose Conway-Walsh of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection to provide an update on the engagement between community employment supervisors and her Department on the provision of pension entitlements.

I have also received notice from Senator Tim Lombard of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Education and Skills to provide an update on the acquisition of a new site for Gaelscoil Chionn tSáile, Kinsale, County Cork.

I have also received notice from Senator Aidan Davitt of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to make a statement on the location of a regional sludge hub centre for the east midlands in Mullingar wastewater treatment plant, County Westmeath.

I have also received notice from Senator Maria Byrne of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Health to provide an update on the independent review of University Hospital Limerick by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and the National Health Service.

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

The need for the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to direct the four Dublin local authorities to prepare an action plan on air quality in Dublin.

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

The need for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to provide an update on the progress of the working group established to review sustainable rural housing guidelines following the Flemish Decree and to publish all reports prepared by it.

I have also received notice from Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Justice and Equality to make a statement on the current payment methods available to people resident in the North of Ireland who are applying for Irish citizenship and if he plans to make changes to streamline the current process.

Of the matters raised by the Senators as suitable for discussion, I have selected Senators Mac Lochlainn, Buttimer, Murnane O'Connor and Boyhan and they will be taken now.

I regret that I had to rule out of order the matter raised by Senator Davitt on the ground that the Minister has no official responsibility in the matter. I regret that I had to rule out of order the matter raised by Senator Gallagher on the ground that it is a repeat of a Commencement matter raised on 20 June 2019. The other Senators may give notice on another day of the matters they wish to raise.

Nithe i dtosach suíonna - Commencement Matters

Family Support Services

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister, Deputy Zappone. I call Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Gabhaim buíochas leis An Leas-Chathaoirleach.

ParentStop in Donegal, an organisation that has operated since 2007 but evolved from a meeting in 2005, is an organic community-led charity. It is a tremendous organisation. In the most recent year, it has supported over 400 families across Donegal. Most of those families are self-referred by word-of-mouth. It is a safe space for parents who are struggling and parents who are separated but still have responsibilities to be parents to their children. A range of professionals, including judges, teachers, social workers, counsellors and healthcare professionals, refer people to this service. I know the Minister is passionate about this kind of community-led approach. That is why I appeal to her today. I appreciate that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has corresponded with my colleague, Councillor Albert Doherty, and it has made it clear that it has tried to increase the supports within limited resources. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, tried its best to support ParentStop, but what is missing here is a multi-agency or a cross-departmental approach. Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures is the framework to do this.

The board of ParentStop has put together a really powerful statement with testimonies from families who have used the service. It is hugely respected across the spectrum in Donegal. It is passionate, but unfortunately it has had to put its team of workers on protective notice every year because of insecure funding from different sources. It is never multi-annual or guaranteed for a defined period. ParentStop is always vulnerable and always under threat. These are really passionate and committed people, but they cannot be financially reckless. This is a charity and it has responsibilities.

I understand the Minister has made a commitment but I urge her to meet with the board of ParentStop. She will be hugely impressed by them as they are her kind of people in terms of being community-led, empowering communities, professional and diligent. I also call for a cross-departmental approach. In fairness, the Ministers for Justice and Equality, Education and Skills, and Health, together with senior officials in those Departments, could work with the Minister's officials to share the financial burden. A proposal has been submitted by the board of ParentStop, which refers to a pilot project in Donegal, based on the learning of ParentStop, which will hopefully result in the continuation of the work of this organisation on a three-year, multi-agency, cross-departmental basis. This has been submitted to the Minister for Education and Skills. This is a tremendous initiative, which has been in place for almost 13 years now. Some 400 families have been supported this year and I have heard nothing but good reports back. It is a very private, safe and healing place for families to be good parents and to look after their children. I appeal to the Minister to meet the board of ParentStop and try to work towards a solution on a cross-departmental basis to try and get this organisation back on the road again.

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank the Leas-Chathaoirleach. It is wonderful to be back in the beautiful Seanad Chamber.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Minister is welcome from the Lower House.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I congratulate all the great craftsmen and craftswomen as it is absolutely stunning.

I thank the Senator, my friend and former colleague, for the opportunity to discuss the planned closure of ParentStop in Donegal. ParentStop is one of many voluntary and community organisations across the country, funded by Tusla and other State agencies, which provide valuable supports to parents and children. Over the past 15 years, as the Senator outlined, ParentStop has supported families in Donegal in a complex range of situations and across the continuum of care.

Services offered by the organisation include one-to-one sessions for families with complex needs, intensive supports for children and brief intervention supports for children and families. ParentStop has assisted families dealing with range of issues, including separation, addiction, financial worries, online safety, obesity, mental health concerns, bullying, stress, and peer pressure. The contribution of ParentStop to supporting parents and their children in Donegal over the past 15 years has been immense. Thousands of families have benefitted from the services provided by the organisation and the growth in the number of families availing of its services over the past number of years reflects how much its services are valued by families themselves and people working closely with children and families in Donegal.

As one of ParentStop's core funders, Tusla has been aware of the organisation's financial difficulties, particularly those arising from the decision of the north-west regional drug and alcohol task force to withdraw funding in 2018. Under Part 8 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Tusla funds a range of organisations that provide services to vulnerable children and families, including those providing parenting supports. Tusla must assign its resources to the areas which it perceives to be in greatest need, ensuring the best outcomes for children and families. The agency seeks to fund those services in the most beneficial, effective, efficient, proportionate and sustainable manner to improve the outcomes for vulnerable children and their families. Recognising the value of the supports provided by ParentStop to parents and families in Donegal, Tusla has taken a number of steps in recent years to assist the organisation reach a sustainable financial position. Between 2016 and 2019, annual funding provided by Tusla to ParentStop increased from €31,000 to €68,625. In 2018, Tusla provided an additional €7,000 to ParentStop to address its recurring annual deficit. The agency provided a further exceptional annual increase of €24,000 to ParentStop in 2018 following withdrawal of funding by the north-west regional drug and alcohol task force. In 2019, the agency provided further once-off funding of €18,640 to assist the organisation to invest time and resources to develop a sustainable funding model.

Unfortunately, despite the support in recent years, ParentStop has decided that it cannot continue to operate within the funding allocations available from its core funders. Tusla and the HSE have been working together in recent weeks to develop a joint proposal for the continuation of the organisation in Donegal. This includes a commitment by all parties Tusla, HSE primary care and HSE health promotion and improvement that funding for ParentStop would be maintained at the existing level for 2020, together with a review of services with a view to developing a strategic plan for the organisation's future, and an exploration of potential additional funding streams. Tusla will continue this engagement with the HSE to see if the closure of ParentStop can be prevented. I will also be meeting Tusla and ParentStop later this month to discuss the matter.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: I welcome the confirmation that the Minister is working with the HSE to find a funding solution and that she is going to meet the board of ParentStop later this month. I acknowledge that Tusla and the Department have tried their best to sustain the services but I feel other agencies and Departments have failed ParentStop.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures is a very good framework. ParentStop is an example where, clearly, its responsibilities in working with over 400 families across Donegal, from one end of the county to the other, are cross-departmental and cover all spectrums, particularly in regard to education, health and the Minister's own area of responsibility, namely, children and youth affairs. The problem has been that other agencies and Departments have not stepped up, despite the forbearance of the Minister, the Department and Tusla, and they have not matched the funding. My concern is that the Minister's statement refers to maintaining the existing level of funding which, at €68,000, would not be enough for this organisation in 2020. I have corresponded with the HSE in Donegal and asked whether it can put some money on the table to make it sustainable in 2020. Does the Minister agree we need more money from the HSE on the table, with the funding from the Department, to give ParentStop a budget it can work with and then, hopefully, build the service?

It would be unimaginable to lose this service. We are talking about hundreds of families and about the social fabric of society. These families have given testimonies that they are in a very bad place and, through the help and support provided, these adults and, more importantly, these children are getting the environments they need, which is better for all of society. This is one we have to win. I appreciate the statement, which is positive and encouraging, but I would like to see more on the table from the HSE.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I thank the Senator. I know a little about the centre and I answered a question on this in the Dáil recently. As I said in my statement, I have been very impressed by its work and that has been represented, at least initially, by the stepping up to the plate, not only in terms of what Tusla has contributed over the last couple of years, but also the willingness to bring together the HSE and the different forums that are currently ongoing. That is certainly a demonstration of our desire to ensure ParentStop sustains itself. I understand how important this is, I really do, and the Senator speaks eloquently about what it has done for the community, the children and the families.

The second point is that what is going on now is the putting together of plans for a sustainable funding model. As the Senator would appreciate, every community and voluntary organisation is responsible to do that for itself. However, because of the work ParentStop has done and the particular issues it is faced with now, Tusla and the HSE are stepping in to try to support it, and they are very happy to do so.

I have spoken with the Minister, Deputy McHugh, in regard to the pilot project which the Deputy referenced. I do not know what the figures are and I would have to check before I commit, but I will certainly go to the HSE on this matter. However, we are aware of the challenge that is facing the organisation and the great contribution it has made. We are in planning mode. I look forward to meeting the representatives of ParentStop towards the end of the month. I hope that, ultimately, this will put them on the sustainable path that it sounds as if they deserve.

Insurance Coverage

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I thank the Minister of State for being available for this debate. The House is well aware the traders in Douglas Village Shopping Centre have had a tumultuous time over recent years. There was a flood and then a fire that affected more than 30 independent traders in Douglas Village Shopping Centre.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I think I visited with Senator Buttimer.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I think the Leas-Chathaoirleach did. Engagement with the insurance companies has been complex and requires a solution from the point of view that not all of them have paid out. As the Minister of State knows quite well, the majority of the people have coverage to protect them from unexpected events. This fire was an unexpected event. To say the least, there has been obfuscation, foot dragging and a less than complete outcome in terms of payment to the traders. It has been piecemeal and laborious. This is a very complex matter because the shopping centre owner is dealing with his issues and the individual traders are dealing with theirs. There is also the issue of the insurance companies telling the traders many different things. The important point is there is a need for the insurance companies to pay out to the individual traders under the business interruption charge so if a business is closed for a period of time a mechanism is available. Cork City Council has waived the fees and rates for those businesses that have shut down. The business interruption charge is about the traders being able to have that money paid out to them through their insurance.

Something that has been very vexing for the traders is that the insurance companies are telling them to go to the owner of the shopping centre to get a letter of comfort stating it will open on, for example, 1 July 2020, which is just a date I have picked. As we all know, the owner of the shopping centre cannot give an exact date because there is a myriad issues. It is just in the past week and a half that we have seen the last remaining cars removed from the roof. This has been kicked down the road. There is a sense that everyone is waiting for someone else to make the first move. I hope that through his good offices the Minister of State will be able to call in the insurance industry to ask it to ensure these traders, who were vulnerable before the fire and are even more vulnerable now, are able to find a solution to their issue. In fairness, some of them received an initial down payment of 10%, 8% or 15% but payments need to be made and we need to give certainty to the traders.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Michael D'Arcy): I thank the Senator for providing me with an opportunity to discuss this issue. I extend my sympathy to all those affected by the fire and the fact the shopping centre remains closed. However, it is a relief that nobody was injured during the fire. Of course, it is less than ideal to have a shopping centre such as Douglas Village Shopping Centre closed for an indefinite period of time, particularly for businesses and employees coming up to the Christmas season.

I understand there are a number of issues relevant to the centre remaining closed, including establishing the cause of the fire, the structural soundness of the building itself and other matters. While there are active insurance claims involved, it is clear there are other issues that may need to be resolved. The Senator will appreciate that the Minister for Finance and I are not responsible for issues arising in individual cases. Rather, we are responsible for the legal framework for insurance. That said, a public interest arises in this situation and I am happy to speak to Insurance Ireland and seek further information about the matter. However, some of the insurers in question might not be members of Insurance Ireland.

I rarely get involved in individual claims, but I am sufficiently satisfied to try to help on this

occasion. I am not certain what level of help that will be, but I will speak to Insurance Ireland and try to reach a position that will expedite the matter.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I thank the Minister of State for his response. This is a matter of public interest and needs to be resolved. I welcome the Minister of State's commitment to speak to Insurance Ireland. This is a question of ensuring that the small to medium-sized shop-keeper or business owner is looked after. I look forward to the engagement of the Minister of State and Insurance Ireland in what is a matter of public interest. The Leas-Chathaoirleach saw the aftermath of the devastation in Douglas.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Indeed.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: In that light, I welcome Cork City Council's parking initiative around Douglas for the Christmas season.

The matter I have raised is of extreme public importance. I thank the Minister of State for his commitment.

Deputy Michael D'Arcy: Insurance exists to put people back into the positions they were in before the event. I have been stringent with insurance companies. People have heard me say that insurance companies sometimes do not treat their clients properly and do not move quickly enough. While it is important that we not get caught underestimating the complexity of this individual matter, it is important that companies act in the interests of their clients, who are their customers, as quickly as possible to try to ensure that people can get back to trading and making a living, and their employees can get back *in situ*. I am open to trying to do what I can. I am not certain how much or little that will be, but I am here to help if possible.

Disability Support Services Provision

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath, is on time as ever. He is welcome.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: Good afternoon. This important issue involves several Departments, but it should most be heard by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, which I hope will resolve it using joined-up thinking.

In my county of Carlow, a number of services provide day and residential supports for those living with disabilities. Many offer supports to people in local authority or private homes who need day services. All of those using day services in some way qualify for free travel, but they cannot access it. If they lived in Dublin, Galway, Cork or Limerick there would be no problem. In rural Carlow, however, they fall victim to the postcode disadvantage. The free travel scheme, which was introduced by the former Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, in 1967, has been a lifeline for many in urban areas but is increasingly not of benefit to those in rural Ireland who must travel just to avail of it, meaning it is not free at all. There is no public transport link around County Carlow. There are public bus and train services to major cities, but there is nothing internal. A new public scheme has not even been put out to tender yet, and it may well be 2021 before there is any movement in that regard.

In the meantime, and due to the limited amount of residential places available, individuals are being allocated local authority homes via social housing agencies in partnership with service

providers and the HSE on the understanding that they can receive day care services. Despite this, no provision has been made to get them to those services. Many living in their own homes or supported living residential settings require support to travel to the services on a daily basis.

All of the main organisations in the Carlow area delivering day services provide limited transport to families from within existing resources, which is an ongoing struggle for them and all agree it is not sustainable and fails to meet the needs of all of the individuals who require transport support. While these providers sometimes receive partial funding from the HSE, it is not enough and they have to stretch budgets elsewhere in to provide dignity and services to these very vulnerable people.

All of the service providers in the Carlow area that offer services to people with disabilities strive to do so in line with the national policy, New Directions, so that a standardised, person-centred, quality approach to service provision to individuals with disabilities can be delivered throughout the county. Access to transport to day services is an ongoing challenge for service users, parents and service providers and is far from a standardised and appropriate response to individual needs.

In the absence of a national policy to support individuals to travel to their chosen day service, we have an inadequate and unfair system in terms of how people are supported to travel to their respective day services throughout the country. A clear direction nationally regarding how people with disabilities can be supported to access services, particularly in rural areas, is required and a mechanism to fund such a policy needs to be agreed and implemented as soon as possible. This is vital to those with disabilities. A future policy decision could consider the option of a service that is providing transport to an individual entitled to free travel being able to reclaim that cost from the appropriate Department. People on the Aran Islands and Tory Island can use their free travel pass, yet people living on the hills of Carlow cannot.

This Government refuses to replace the mobility allowance, a payment previously made to people with severe disabilities in respect of public transport costs for taxis and so on to enable them to get around for social and health reasons. A memorandum on proposals for a new transport support scheme was brought to Cabinet but was later withdrawn in favour of revised proposals. I was disappointed to hear this. I would like to know what is happening in this regard and what the Department is doing to ensure those people who need to access transport to a therapy service can get that access. These people have free travel passes issued by the Department. This is incredibly unfair. It is unfair of this Government to expect service providers to lose out in respect of service provision that is essential to persons living with a disability. Many of our local stations are not wheelchair accessible and they have no toilet facilities. When will people living with disabilities be treated with the respect they need and deserve?

I acknowledge that this is a matter for the HSE and the Departments of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Someone somewhere in the system needs to examine it with a view to identifying what can be done to get these people the service to which they are entitled. The ethos of these service providers is equality, dignity, privacy, safety and respect for their service users. We need to find a way to support them in whatever way we can so that users can enjoy the opportunity to be the very best.

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I thank the Senator for raising this important issue, in respect of which she has put forward many valid arguments.

Before dealing with the specific issue in Carlow, I would like to point out that the free travel scheme is available to all people aged over 66, including carers and people in receipt of certain disability payments. There are currently 952,000 customers in the scheme, with an annual allocation of €95 million. The scheme permits travel for free on most CIÉ and public transport services, the Luas and some 80 private operators. Free travel is also available on cross-Border journeys and within Northern Ireland if the person is aged over 66.

As rightly stated by the Senator, the scheme was introduced to promote social inclusion and to prevent isolation of our elderly and disabled people by taking advantage of the free space on public transport services. In general, access to a free travel pass for those aged under 66 is linked to a person being in receipt of certain primary social protection payments such as disability allowance, invalidity pension, carer's allowance, blind pension and partial capacity benefit. In 1997, the scheme was extended to all registered blind people, regardless of whether they qualified for the blind person's pension or any other social protection payment.

The Senator should note that under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection may separately award a travel supplement if this is warranted by the circumstances of the case. This supplement is intended to assist with ongoing or recurring travel costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. Every decision is based on consideration of the particular circumstances of the case, taking account of the nature and extent of the need and resources of the person concerned. I can bring the valid point the Senator has raised about specific issues relating to Carlow to the attention of the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. Transport is an important part of the national disability inclusion strategy, which I chair. If places like Carlow are not getting an adequate service, and if Senators from other counties feel that people with disabilities are similarly excluded, this is something that I will personally drive.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I welcome the Minister of State's response. It is so important. We have great service providers in Carlow, but people cannot access them. It is huge. It is a matter for all the different Departments. It is all about everyone working together from the same pot to ensure this happens. I will follow this up with the Minister of State.

Deputy Finian McGrath: The Senator is absolutely right when she says we must all work together. That is the whole idea behind the national disability inclusion strategy. I agree with the Senator's earlier comment that a clear direction is needed. It is important to ensure all Departments work together. In this case, the Departments of Transport, Tourism and Sport and Employment Affairs and Social Protection must work with the HSE and the Department of Health. The Senator also mentioned the transport support Bill. I have two drafts of two Bills on the issue of transport for people with disabilities. The Senator also mentioned accessibility in train stations in County Carlow, which I will raise with the authorities.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: This is a serious issue in Bagenalstown.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Absolutely. These issues are very important. Having ratified the UN convention, we must make it meaningful for people with disabilities. I will follow up on the issues that have been raised by the Senator and I will come back to her with a response.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I thank the Minister of State.

Senator Victor Boyhan: I welcome the Minister to the House. He will be familiar with the Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers Association, ICSA, with which he and his Department work closely. It has raised the issue of capacity to expand and develop the wool industry. Sheep wool is natural, renewable and biodegradable and has many uses. There is a strong case for its usage in the greening and insulation of houses and, in particular, industrial properties, etc., to be examined. As a material, it has enormous potential. Work is ongoing on how we can expand the use and demand for wool, particularly Irish wool. There are opportunities to develop the wool industry that need to be explored.

The national sheep chairman of the ICSA, Mr. John Brooks, contacted me and provided me with various press releases and statements he has issued seeking the establishment of a dedicated Irish wool forum. He sees such a forum as of particular importance in addressing some of the issues relating to the wool industry and makes a strong case for its establishment. The Minister will point out that there have been many groups, subgroups and subdivisions of subgroups in the agriculture industry, but this is a particular market and should be given favourable consideration. All indications point to an impending total price collapse for wool. The market in Britain has totally collapsed. We want to encourage the shearing of sheep. In terms of animal welfare and husbandry, it is unacceptable for them not to be sheared. There is a requirement for sheep in the meat industry, but there is also a market for wool. Irish wool is a particularly good product.

I ask the Minister to give serious consideration to the establishment of such a forum, to include representation of interested groups, particularly the ICSA. Wool is an abundant natural resource, which is renewable and biodegradable. It has many benefits. Traditionally, we have had a wonderful industry engaged in the manufacturing of wool and wool-related cloth. There is scope to develop it. It needs a new focus and, as such, I am asking, as Mr. Brooks requested, that the Minister and his Department give serious consideration to the establishment of this forum or explore other options for the protection and, more important, the expansion of this industry.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I thank the Senator for his question. I apologise to the House for being late. I was engaged on the Order of Business in the Dáil.

Wool production is an important component of the Irish agri-industry. There are approximately 45,500 sheep flock-keepers registered on my Department's database. The 2018 census returns indicate that a total of 3.73 million sheep were kept in the country at the end of December 2018, representing a decrease of 142,000 or 4% on the total number recorded in December 2017. Approximately 2.99 million sheep were slaughtered in 2018. On producing wool for sale, in general, the farmer outsources the shearing of the sheep and sells the wool to agents. Officials of my Department oversee and inspect 50 approved and registered wool stores where wool is held while awaiting sale.

Ireland produces excellent quality wool. The factors contributing to this include Irish genetic breeding standards, sheep welfare standards and the availability of quality Irish grass, water and nutritional supplementation on sheep farms. Irish sheep have a high animal health status, being free from sheep exotic diseases, including sheep pox, that, when present, downgrade wool quality. In addition, Irish sheep farms adhere to high biosecurity and quality assurance standards. The animal husbandry on sheep farms ensures that programmes are in place to control ectoparasites such as sheep scab that can downgrade wool quality if not controlled.

All of these factors contribute to the excellent quality of Irish wool. In addition, while national policies such as the clean livestock policy and the Bord Bia assurance scheme for lamb focus on food policy, they impact directly on the quality and cleanliness of the wool. The cleanliness of a fleece is related to farming practices where the sheep originates, as well as being influenced by the stakeholders along the supply chain. All stakeholders can influence the cleanliness of the sheep fleece.

In an industry such as the wool industry, where prices tend to move in cycles, it is imperative the industry players ensure and promote a diversity of options for the product in the marketplace. Wool is used in fabrics, carpeting, bedding and insulation. It can also be used in gardening and makes an excellent compost. Another possibility for the use of wool is wool pellet production, which is an excellent organic fertiliser. The current market uncertainties should provide an impetus for the industry players to come together to see what business opportunities are out there and to try to promote the excellent product in as many markets as possible. Based on my contacts with the industry, I am aware of huge possibilities in developing the Japanese wool trade market and to that end, I provided the wool industry with a letter of support for its Japanese contacts confirming the excellent quality of Irish-produced wool. Market forces and market demand, as the Senator is aware, dictate price and while I understand there are issues with price at the moment, I wish to inform the Senator that at present I am not considering the establishment of a dedicated Irish wool forum as requested by him. However, my officials and I will of course consider any proposal the industry wishes to submit in this regard.

Senator Victor Boyhan: I thank the Minister. He was honest and frank and I always like to hear that from a Minister. He tells it as it is and I acknowledge that. It is encouraging that the Minister has shared with us the possibility for developing the Japanese wool trade market. That is something I never knew that I have learned today so I will take that away with me. I note the Minister is not prepared at this stage to consider the establishment of a wool producers' forum, and he has set out the rationale and reasons for same, which I accept. I will convey that message to the ICSA in following up on this. I also note the Minister has said he will keep the door open and he will consider other proposals from the industry if they are forthcoming. I thank the Minister for that.

Deputy Michael Creed: I thank the Senator for raising the matter. It is an extraordinary resource and it is regrettable, given the way markets have evolved, that a product of this quality, which is a natural fabric, has been displaced in many of its traditional markets over many years. We were probably all reared in households where there was always a ball of wool over the mantelpiece. That day is long gone. Synthetic fibres have displaced a lot of the traditional uses of wool. There are niche markets there, which we can support, and there is some activity in that area. I engaged with some people from Japan in my Department who are interested, in conjunction with Irish partners, in developing that market as an opportunity. It is a sign of the rapidly changing times that traditional uses are being displaced and we need to look at the other uses. As I outlined today, some of those uses may not be mainstream, such as pelleting for organic fertiliser and insulation. We have a huge job of work to do in this country to retrofit buildings for climate change purposes. Here is a natural product that could assist with that. There are opportunities. It is a question of the players working collaboratively to find out what the best market returns are, because sheep farming is a low-margin enterprise, and for many, shearing is a cost with little gain from the product shorn. It behoves all of us to work collaboratively to try to find new opportunities for that product.

Acting Chairman (Senator Robbie Gallagher): I welcome our guests to the Gallery this

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afternoon. Tá fáilte romhaibh go léir.

Teachtaireacht ón Dáil - Message from Dáil

Acting Chairman (Senator Robbie Gallagher): On 24 October 2019, Dáil Éireann passed the Industrial Development (Amendment) Bill 2019, considered by virtue of Article 20.2.2° of the Constitution as a Bill initiated in Dáil Éireann, to which the agreement of Seanad Éireann is desired.

Sitting suspended at 3.20 p.m. and resumed at 3.30 p.m.

Election of Member

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I have to announce that the following Member has been elected to fill the casual vacancy in the membership of the Seanad to which the resolution of Seanad Éireann on 25 September 2019 has reference:

Agricultural Panel, Oireachtas Sub-Panel: Pippa Hackett.

Senator Hackett was introduced to the Leas-Chathaoirleach and then took her seat.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I again congratulate the Senator and I welcome her husband, Mark, and children, Heidi and George.

An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Order of Business is No. 1, statements on climate action, to be taken at 4.45 p.m., with the contributions of group spokespersons not to exceed ten minutes and those of all other Senators not to exceed six minutes.

I join the Leas-Chathaoirleach in welcoming our colleague, Senator Pippa Hackett, to the House and wish her and her family every success during her tenure. Comhghairdeas agus beir bua.

I also welcome the transition year students from Christ the King school in Cork who are in the Gallery.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I am glad the Leader did not forget them.

Senator Catherine Ardagh: First, I welcome our new colleague, Senator Hackett, to the House. I congratulate her and her family. It is great to have them in here today as it is certainly a day they will always remember.

I would like to raise the passing of the late Gay Byrne and extend my condolences and those of the Fianna Fáil group in the House to his wife, Kathleen, daughters, Suzy and Crona, and his larger family and colleagues at RTÉ. I grew up watching Gay Byrne on “The Late Late Show” every Friday night. He was a real trailblazer not alone in his distinguished broadcasting career but in the massive influence he had on wider society, giving people permission, as it were, to discuss topics that would not generally have been discussed at that time. Not alone did he introduce us to Boyzone but during the AIDS epidemic, he introduced Irish people to condoms and there was a funny episode where he-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: He introduced the Senator to boys.

Senator Catherine Ardagh: Boyzone. We were all very sad yesterday when we heard of his passing. Ní fheicimid a leithéid arís and ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dilis.

I would also like to raise an issue I have raised regularly in the House, which is that of housing and homelessness. In 2018, we were told in the budget introduced at that time that an affordable housing scheme would be established but it is fair to say no such scheme has worked effectively. We have not seen many fruits from that scheme and we have seen an increase in the number of people accessing emergency homeless accommodation. There are more than 10,400 on the list for such accommodation, comprising more than 6,500 adults and 3,800 children. That list does not include those we call the hidden homeless who are not accessing emergency hotel accommodation but living with grandmothers or parents. Many people are living at home, cannot afford rent and are not on the emergency accommodation lists. Members may have seen the Focus Ireland advertisement and for those who are accessing emergency accommodation, especially children, what is portrayed in that advertisement is a real scenario in that children are living in hotel rooms in which one could not swing a cat and in which the parents cannot cook. Parents are trying to give their children a proper childhood but it is impossible in such accommodation. There will be major repercussions for those children, and society, down the road if we do not ensure this homelessness crisis is resolved in some way. It is a disaster for those families, especially coming up to Christmas. It is very upsetting for them and for all of us. We have let them down. I would like to see a lot more done. The number of people accessing emergency homeless accommodation has remained at in or around 10,000 since we started in the Seanad. Something urgent must be done. I know we say it all the time but no holes have been made in it and there have been no changes. We need to take the figures seriously, as they will increase as the weather deteriorates, despite Leo’s comments on climate change and temperatures increasing.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Does the Senator mean the Taoiseach?

Senator Catherine Ardagh: Yes. Apologies.

Senator Marie-Louise O’Donnell: In Milton’s poem, “Samson Agonistes”, Milton says of Samson when he dies:

No time for lamentation now,

...Samson hath quit himself

Like Samson...and...hath finished

A life heroic

5 November 2019

I say that about Gay Byrne. Gay Byrne was a broadcasting legend, a husband, a father and a grandfather. He was an extraordinary communicator across our entire country, and beyond, for 60 years. He woke us all up and he protected us as he did it, and his talent was immeasurable. He was a cultural and social barometer of an Ireland about to grow up across those years and face all of its responsibilities both past and present. In the history of the State, through the national broadcaster, RTÉ, he totally embodied what all great public service broadcasting aspires to, namely, entertainment, information and education across radio and television. Most of us through our lives, if we are paying any kind of attention, can learn and are capable of learning through osmosis. We watch and we listen. It is how I learned from great teachers who never knew I was doing it; from great artists, great poets, great thinkers and great elders. I learned by osmosis from those that I admired from afar when I was young. Anybody who had any interest in the art, skill and craft of communication knew to look in the direction of Gay Byrne. There, one would find a master. When I became a friend in later life, that admiration only deepened and grew. Gay Byrne's talents were enormous but he wore them very lightly and he spent most of his life creating platforms daily for all others to be great and good.

Who are the people who have changed and altered Ireland for the better? People might name politicians from all sides, and they would be right. Indeed, they might even name religious leaders, doctors, teachers and artists. I name Gay Byrne, without argument or opposition. We owe him so much. He broke our silences and he taught us to speak out and speak up and not be afraid of what we were capable of and indeed what we needed and had to face.

In some way, there is a voice and nothing more. Beckett believed that. Through his voice we heard meaning. We heard meaning because his voice always paralleled meaning. His voice bore meaning. His voice found meaning - ordinary meanings and extraordinary meanings, complexities and distinctiveness, a kind of kernel of our social bonds, both intimate and objective, but all the time his voice always made acoustic sense. Across generations we inhabited the universe of his voice. We made our way through our daily lives with his voice. He introduced us to other voices, other music, other meanings, other media and we became intermingled with the lot, first on radio and then on television where voice is still dominant. Progress over 50 years in Ireland in some way announced itself through his voice and his show. In some way, Gay Byrne's voice was a sign of Ireland's life and, as such, compelling. We have lost a compelling voice away from the maddening crowd. It is now time to carry its echo with us.

After the death of Seamus Heaney, I quoted his play "The Cure at Troy", a dramatisation of Sophocles's "Philoctetes". Seamus Heaney was a favourite poet of Gay Byrne's wife, Kathleen Watkins. I wish to quote lines spoken by the chorus of elders at the close of the play. I would consider myself, after many years here, an elder of the Seanad. I am very happy to say that because I have learned so much here. I have listened well and I have learned from other great Senators here by osmosis. I will end with the words of the chorus of elders, Seamus Heaney's words:

Now it's high watermark

And floodtide in the heart

And time to go.

The sea-nymphs in the spray

Will be the chorus now.

What's left to say?

Suspect too much sweet talk

But never close your mind.

It was a fortunate wind

that blew me here. I leave

half-ready to believe

That a crippled trust might walk

And the half-true rhyme is love.

I say that of Gay Byrne. May he rest in peace.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: I welcome Senator Hackett to the Seanad. I hope she has a fruitful and enjoyable time here, as did her predecessor, Grace O'Sullivan. We look forward to working with her.

I, too, extend my condolences to Kathleen, Crona, Suzy, the wider Byrne family and the very many friends of Gay Byrne. Many tributes have been paid to Gay over the past 24 hours. His easy manner and unique tone of voice will long be remembered throughout the households of this State. For me, coming from County Mayo, one of the moments of note captured over the past 24 hours was his famous interview that led to Mr. Tom Gilmartin speaking out. Mr. Gilmartin was the man who brought down a Taoiseach and exposed the greed and corruption in this country. Gay Byrne and his easy style of interviewing brought that to the fore.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: That was a matter for the findings and the relevant report. Senator McDowell might correct me later but I believe some of the content of the report might have been corrected in a Supreme Court judgment. I do not believe we should be getting into tribunal reports at this stage. I understand the Senator's reference otherwise.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: I acknowledge what the Leas-Chathaoirleach is saying. What I am trying to get across is Gay Byrne's style of interviewing people, the way he dealt with issues-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Absolutely.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: -----and the way in which he made people feel at ease when interviewing them.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: That is undoubted.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: He played a very significant part at a very important time in this country, a time of transition in many areas. He will be missed by his family in the main.

I extend my condolences to it. May his soul rest in peace.

Senator David Norris: I have already spoken on the wireless about Gay Byrne. I knew him for over 40 years. I will be speaking about him again twice on television this evening so I will leave it to my colleagues to pay tribute to him. He was a most remarkable man.

I welcome very warmly to Seanad Éireann Senator Hackett. I have only just met her but I can tell instinctively that she will be a great Senator, like her predecessor from the Green Party.

I wish to raise the issue of privatisation, which seems to be a madness spreading all over this country. The bin services were privatised, which was an absolutely lunatic idea. We are now paying about three times and in three separate ways for the collection of bins. Half a dozen different bin companies are charging up and down the streets of residential areas at all hours of the day and night. In the old days, they used to pick up the rubbish. Nowadays they do not. They just pick up those that have their tags. We are provided in my street with plastic bags for the rubbish but they are useless. One has to buy the plastic bags but they are so thin that seagulls reef them and spread the rubbish all over the road.

On top of that, this weekend once again, two enormous black plastic bin liners were left in the street, right outside my front door. Within minutes, the seagulls had got at them and spread the rubbish all over the street. It is absolutely unacceptable. For the entire weekend, the street was filled with rubbish, knee deep. It is a disgrace. The Government should lean on local authorities and say it is time they got their act together and forgot the idea of privatisation. As I have noted previously, such companies are not registered in Ireland for tax purposes and, therefore, we do not know anything about their profits. They are a collection of gangsters.

Senator Paul Gavan: They are gangsters.

Senator David Norris: I remember when they were burning out one another's lorries. It is outrageous. One would not get it from the mafia. We ought to take a firm stand and demand an end to privatisation in this country. We need to have a sense of national identity and community, and to look after the people, not after the business interests allowing such companies to profiteer.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Was that a PD speech?

Senator David Norris: What is that?

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Was that a PD speech?

Senator David Norris: I do not know. Is the Senator a PD?

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Order, please. I call Senator Higgins.

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins: I join in the expressions of condolence so eloquently made by others across the House. I also join wholeheartedly in welcoming Senator Hackett to the Chamber and her family to the Public Gallery. I was happy and proud to be one of those who nominated the Senator to her role, and we look forward very much to working with her. Following discussion with members of the Civil Engagement group, she has decided that, even though she represents what is perhaps a different mandate as a member of the Green Party, she

is also interested in the work we do in our civil society mandate. We look forward to working alongside her in many interesting debates and to any new perspectives she will bring to the general work we all do together in the House.

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Deputy Zappone, will tomorrow lay before the Houses of the Oireachtas a report based on work done in the Chamber, namely, an amendment of mine in respect of open and semi-open adoption in Ireland. It was an attempt to move past the closed and secretive system of adoption that has obtained for many decades, in many cases with devastating consequences for families and individuals. I am delighted that the amendment I tabled two years ago, requiring a review of the possibilities and potential for open adoption, has come to fruition and that tomorrow we will be given a copy of the report on open and semi-open adoption. Crucially, post-adoption supports and post-adoption contact plans will allow children to have the widest range of appropriate and helpful relationships as they shape their lives. I ask the Leader that when the report is laid before the House, we might have the opportunity to debate it as part of a move away from a climate of secrecy to a new, transparent and caring model for adoption.

A debate on the use of the money message mechanism is due to take place in the other House this week. It is relevant to us not in respect of our Standing Orders and operations but because many good Bills from many Senators have passed with full debate in the Chamber and are before the other House, awaiting a final hearing at a later stage. I hope we can find a resolution to the issue. Good ideas can come from anywhere and we need to ensure that any of them, whether they come from an Opposition or Government bench, will have the opportunity to reach its full development. It is part of what we all do as legislators. I urge the Leader to appeal to the Government to accommodate movement in respect of the money message mechanism, in order that there will be progress, as is the intention in the Constitution for the separate but complementary roles of the Houses.

Senator Maura Hopkins: I raise the serious issue of the Cuisle national respite centre in Donamon in Roscommon. I have spoken with quite a number of staff members and service users of the Cuisle respite centre over the past number of days since news broke last Friday that it is to close on 29 November this year. This decision was made by the board of the Irish Wheelchair Association. It is really devastating and dreadful news for the service users, the 48 staff who are employed there and the local community in Donamon. The Cuisle centre is incredibly important for people with disabilities as it allows them to enjoy accessible holidays. It is a national centre and attracts people from all over Ireland and abroad.

I have spoken with the director of services at the Irish Wheelchair Association about the reasons for this decision and am advised that there is a need to complete electrical works at the centre which will cost well over €1 million. I am also advised that costings were sent to the HSE, although we do not have the exact details of the business plan that was sent to the HSE. I am also advised that a different model of care is in the process of being implemented which would involve moving away from congregated settings to more integrated holiday services within private hotels.

I want to clearly make the following point. I worked in the health service as an occupational therapist for eight years. I am very aware of the needs of many individuals with disabilities and the specialist equipment, facilities and carer support they require. I am extremely concerned that such a service cannot be provided elsewhere.

I have listened to many people who use that service, all of whom spoke positively about the fact that they are able to enjoy a holiday within a supportive environment. I have contacted the Minister, Deputy Harris, and the Minister of State with responsibility for disabilities, Deputy Finian McGrath, in order to explore all the options available to keep this important respite centre open. There will be a meeting with the Minister of State at 2.30 p.m. tomorrow but it is important that this issue is raised in the Seanad because this is a national respite centre and we need to support people with disabilities to live at home for the longest time possible but also to be able to enjoy holidays within a supportive environment.

Senator Terry Leyden: I sincerely welcome Senator Pippa Hackett from Offaly. I wish her every success and commend the wisdom of the leader of Fianna Fáil who initiated the Green Party getting the available seat. I think that is correct.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: It should be noted that it was a unanimous decision of the entire House.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Senator Leyden is playing for transfers.

Senator Terry Leyden: It was unanimous with the support-----

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Victor and Gerry wrote to them last week about it.

Senator Terry Leyden: -----and leadership of the Fianna Fáil Party. I welcome Senator Hackett's husband and two beautiful children to the House. I wish her every success for a great career here in the future. I want to see her bringing the issue of climate change into this House and reminding the Taoiseach that there are no pluses to climate change.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Senator was never in government.

Senator Terry Leyden: I was in government a few times.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: It is a pity the Senator was not here when Fianna Fáil was in government.

Senator Terry Leyden: I thank Senator Hopkins for raising an issue that is causing us great distress. I am calling on the Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath, to come to this House, although I know we are meeting him tomorrow to discuss this matter. Last Friday, the regional manager, Tony Cunningham, called a meeting at 4 p.m. and informed the staff of Cuisle, the national holiday and respite centre of the Irish Wheelchair Association that the facilities at Donamon, Roscommon, were closing on 29 November with the loss of at least 45 jobs and the removal of a service for wheelchair users, their families and supporters, that has been there for the past 22 years. The centre is on the grounds of the Donamon Castle which is in the ownership of the Divine Word Missionaries who have been there since 1939. The lease of which expires in 2026. I am calling on Ms Rosemary Keogh, the chief executive officer of the Irish Wheelchair Association, to answer my telephone calls and talk to me about the decision she has made.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator knows he should not be naming people.

Senator Terry Leyden: I know, a Leas-Chathaoirligh. I have located the chairman, Mr. Martin Kelly, and I ask him to telephone me. I know he works for Monaghan Mushrooms.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I do not want the Senator to give names in the Chamber. He is abusing his privilege.

Senator Terry Leyden: I ask him to please inform me why he is callously closing this facility in Donamon, Roscommon, which I fully support.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator has gone well over his time.

Senator Terry Leyden: My daughter, Councillor Leyden, has received 31,000 hits in respect of this. I want the same-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator is well over his time.

Senator Terry Leyden: -----time as Senator Hopkins.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Senator got the same time.

Senator Victor Boyhan: The telephone is ringing.

Senator Terry Leyden: I want to tell the Chamber that on-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Leaders have three minutes and everybody else has two minutes.

Senator Terry Leyden: -----on 6 and 7 November, the Irish Wheelchair Association is running its fundraiser called Little Angels. It is a very strange situation where it is closing a great facility in Roscommon and it is having its Little Angels fundraising event tomorrow and the next day. I will continue to raise this issue in the House and to fight for this. I do not care what rule I break. I am going to do my best, with Senator Hopkins and others, to get this decision reversed.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator is out of order.

Senator Terry Leyden: I am very much in order, a Leas-Chathaoirligh.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator is out of order. I call Senator Craughwell.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I join with all of my colleagues in welcoming Senator Hackett and her family to the Chamber. I hope she enjoys her time here. She is with a good group in the Chamber. She should have spoken to us first as we would have offered better terms and conditions, but such is life.

Over the weekend, the *Sunday World* published an article about the repatriation of Lisa Smith and her daughter to this country, and the fact that the Irish Army Ranger Wing was involved. I am asking the Leader of the House to make a statement on this today. The release of this information during an operation, which is not yet over, was, to say the very least, poorly thought out. I am aware that the Defence Forces management is somewhat concerned about the fact that members of the Army Ranger Wing are out there at the moment, doing whatever they do, to bring this lady home.

Ms Smith will be brought home and the child who is allegedly hers will be brought with her as well. We are unsure about this because we have had no insight into what testing has taken place to establish the child's true identity. We also have a situation where the child could

claim three nationalities, namely, Syrian, UK or Irish. At the end of the day, this places us in a rather precarious position. When Ms Smith returns to this country she will be a subject of interest for An Garda Síochána which is something that must concern every citizen. There is valuable information to be got on how she became radicalised and finished up where she did. I am not going to prejudge what she may or may not have been involved in as that is a matter for An Garda when she comes home. The Government, however, must get to the bottom of who released this information. It is unheard of for a military operation, which is ongoing, to be reported in the national media and possibly place the lives of people at risk. On the other side, I have to commend the Defence Forces, which are always ready and willing to do whatever is asked of them by Government.

I join with my colleagues in acknowledging the passing of Gay Byrne. All of us in this Chamber can recall, certainly from the time I was in short pants right through to the time when I lost all of my hair, that Gay Byrne influenced everything in our lives. Some of his programmes were amusing and some of them were highly serious. I would not dream of naming names or mentioning people, but he was a tremendous icon and he will be sorely missed.

Senator Neale Richmond: I join with others in warmly welcoming Senator Pippa Hackett to the Chamber, as well as her family. No doubt she has big shoes to fill in terms of following the former Senator, Grace O’Sullivan, but I have no doubt she is up to the test.

On a happy note, I warmly congratulate the Irish women’s hockey team on their wonderful qualification for the Tokyo Olympic Games. I was very fortunate to spend the weekend at both games in Energia Park in Donnybrook. While we were joined by the Taoiseach, the Minister and Deputy O’Connell on Sunday-----

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: We saw the photographs.

Senator Neale Richmond: -----the most important person there, to my mind, was my young niece, April, who was attending not only her first international hockey match but the largest international women’s sports match in terms of attendance ever held in this country. It was a wonderful day for her to see absolute heroes on the pitch, fulfilling their aspirations to qualify for the Olympics and proving a real example.

There is a lot going on in women’s sport in this country that we should be happy about. We have the women’s rugby team playing Wales, our women’s national soccer team are having great success and we see record-breaking numbers attending the football and camogie finals. However, so much more can be done. As the saying goes: “Can’t see, can’t be”. It is so important for women and girls across the country that all the State broadcasters and private broadcasters increase their level of coverage of all sports, but particularly women’s games at every level. If we look at the achievements of the women’s hockey team at the weekend, coming after the absolute disappointment for the men’s team just the previous week, that is the example we can all aspire to. We wish them well and, hopefully, they can repeat their success at the Olympics in Tokyo next year.

Senator Máire Devine: Céad míle fáilte to Senator Pippa Hackett. I hope she enjoys the pantomime that this place sometimes brings.

I want to comment on the overcrowding, which is often described as obscene but is also insupportable. I know the issues in Limerick are constantly being raised by Senators Byrne and Gavan, and there is also Cork University Hospital in the Leader’s area, as well as the situ-

ation at the hospitals in Letterkenny and south Tipperary. The INMO brings out statistics on a monthly basis and, obviously, the recent figure is the highest so far this year, with 679 people on trolleys. Every year, we have the winter initiative and we know overcrowding is at its worst in February and March every year. Unfortunately, it would seem the winter initiative needs to become a year-round initiative to try to find capacity. We have empty wards and problems with recruitment and retention, as well as the significant increase in the population of the country, but we have not increased capacity while trying to recruit and retain medical staff. The Minister, Deputy Harris, is to meet each hospital group this afternoon. I ask that he would come back into the House to report on what their initiatives and plans are but, more importantly, what their actions are.

Dovetailing into this is an alarming report about the rise in the number of teenagers missing school at second level. Tusla has launched a survey and it is the first year it has monitored school attendance. The survey shows that 12% of referrals to its service concerned people who cannot or will not attend school due to stress and anxiety. It is the first time this has been named and, for example, they say they cannot attend due to the school atmosphere or other pressures that are going on in their lives. Tusla will not take a disciplinary approach but is urging parents and students to contact it with these referrals, so it can sit down in a non-judgmental way and try to work out the difficulties.

Senator Frank Feighan: I welcome our new colleague, Senator Pippa Hackett. It is a great honour to come through the gates to either House of the Oireachtas. I pay tribute to her colleague who has gone to the European Parliament. She is hugely respected in all parties. I wish Senator Hackett all the best.

I condemn outright the attack on the property of my colleague, Deputy Martin Kenny, last Sunday week. The attack was deeply serious and a sinister development. An attack on an elected Member is an attack on all society. I know the House will join me in condemning outright the attack on our colleague, Deputy Martin Kenny.

Senator Frank Feighan: Hear, hear.

Senator Frank Feighan: I ask anybody with information to contact the Garda. There is a peaceful and respectful group in Ballinamore and I hope we come to a resolution to a very difficult situation. I condemn outright the attack on the property of our colleague and friend, Deputy Martin Kenny.

I pay tribute to Gay Byrne. Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, he was a light in a very dark era of our country. He certainly brought forward many liberal issues. We should recognise the contribution he has made to Irish life and society.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I also welcome Senator Hackett to the House and wish her well. I congratulate the Irish women's hockey team who will go to Tokyo in 2020. They have done us proud.

On a sad note, I express my sympathies to the Byrne family. Gay Byrne was a national treasure and there is no doubt about it. He had a massive impact on all of our lives.

I want to raise an issue that came to my attention during the Halloween break. Home buyers are being charged extraordinary money to view homes. I have heard of people being charged up to €100 just to view of a house. According to the provider of the viewing, the money is only

refundable if the applicant is successful in buying the house. This is illegal. The fact that it might be common practice alarms me. I cannot decide whether it is a sinister way to weed out those with less disposable money or a cash making opportunity. I encourage all of us to alert the public about their rights when it comes to viewing homes. I would love to hear what the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, has to say on the matter. Perhaps the Leader will bring the matter to his attention and revert with the reply.

Senator Maria Byrne: I welcome Senator Pippa Hackett to the Chamber and I look forward to working with her.

I agree with my colleague, Senator Richmond, regarding the women's hockey team. I must be parochial and single out Roisin Upton, who scored the sudden death penalty to win. It was great to see members of the Hogan and Upton families in the crowd. The team has given great pleasure not only to those at home in their sitting rooms but also to those present. It is great to see women's sport on the rise as well as support for women's sport.

I cannot let today go without raising the issue of University Hospital Limerick, UHL, which Senator Devine also raised. A total of 679 people are on trolleys nationwide, 63 of whom are in UHL. We are not even into the winter season yet. Throughout the summer, UHL topped the list and it tops it again today. It is unbelievable. A meeting of the Joint Committee on Health took place on 2 October, which I attended, even though I am not a member. Mr. Paul Reid, the new CEO of the HSE, attended as did the Minister. There was a commitment on the day that the Members from the mid-west would be met within two to three weeks of the meeting to examine the various issues facing UHL. That meeting has not happened to date. I have written several times and asked questions about it but I have received no response. Will the Leader follow up on when that meeting can be held? It is important that Members from the mid-west meet Mr. Reid and the hospital group's CEO, Professor Colette Cowan. This is not just about the patients who are on trolleys, but about the staff and conditions as well. We have the largest and newest accident and emergency unit in the country, yet the numbers are still rising. Ironically, more than a third of those on trolleys today are in the west. Mr. Reid needs to address this issue with the various hospital group CEOs, especially as it relates to University Hospital Limerick. I await the Leader's response, whom I am sure will revert to me shortly.

Senator Victor Boyhan: I welcome Senator Hackett and wish her well. I also welcome her husband, daughter and son. This is a demanding role. It is great to have a Green Member back in Seanad Éireann.

The Leader will be aware that the family of the late Shane O'Farrell brought their campaign to the gates of Leinster House today. I do not know how many Senators took the time, or got time, to meet the family, but I did. We all know of Shane O'Farrell's story and the family's campaign for justice for him. The matter was brought to the Oireachtas. There was a demonstration today at which the family issued a press release and met the media. This is a difficult story. The family is calling for the Minister for Justice and Equality to establish a public inquiry into the circumstances leading to the 23 year old's death in 2011. Senators are aware of the case's background. The family wants to know what actions State agencies took prior and subsequent to Shane's death. In 2018 and 2019, the Houses passed motions to establish a public inquiry into these events. The Department of Justice and Equality has instead opted for a scoping exercise. The Minister elaborated on that in the Seanad some time back. The exercise was to seek the family's views, but family members have said that it was an inadequate vehicle to achieve justice for their son, their loved one and their brother. All of us can understand and

empathise with those concerns.

Will the Leader and every Senator use their connections and good offices to call on the Minister to progress the matter of a public inquiry in line with the family's wishes for truth and transparency surrounding the tragic circumstances leading to Shane's loss? It was a tragedy, and there are people who know the facts of the real story. The family members are entitled to a full examination of all the facts concerning the death of their dear son and loved one. I appeal to the Leader to use his good office to see how to progress the matter. All Senators should seek to support the family. The House debated the issue, took a decision and demonstrated to the family our support, but words are meaningless if they cannot be pushed into action. I am making this call on behalf of the family, who cannot be here. The O'Farrells need help and wish to have our support. I hope we will give it to them.

Senator Martin Conway: I welcome Senator Hackett to the House. We miss our wonderful former colleague, Grace O'Sullivan. We were all fond of her and worked well with her. I do not doubt that we will work well with Senator Hackett too. It will enrich the House to have a new Senator from the Green Party. I wish her well.

I share Senator Byrne's frustration with the situation at the accident and emergency department at University Hospital Limerick. We are all blue in the face raising such cases at this stage. I agree with the Senator, in that it is time that Mr. Reid got a handle on the matter. There are issues with early discharges and not-so-early discharges from the hospital. The Minister made an unannounced visit last August. When there was an analysis following on from that of why there were so many people on trolleys, it transpired that there was a logjam in discharges, with delayed discharges causing serious problems. The HSE has a responsibility to explain why there are 63 people on trolleys in that hospital. We need a detailed breakdown of discharges and delayed discharges. We need to know if people identified as ready for discharge are being discharged and, if not, why not?

I welcome the comments of Senator Feighan in regard to our colleague in the Houses of the Oireachtas, Deputy Martin Kenny, who, in my dealings with him, I have found to be an absolute gentleman. What happened to his car was an absolute disgrace and it has been, rightly, condemned by everybody. There is a problem though in that four proposed direct provision centres have not gone ahead. We have an international obligation to provide accommodation for people who come to this country seeking our protection. I want to see the facilities in Achill Island, Leitrim and everywhere else where they have been proposed, opened. We must have a collective conversation on this issue. There must be engagement and consultation with communities. It is appalling, however, that a State Department did not relocate 13 vulnerable people to Achill Island because there were concerns regarding their safety and so on. This is not acceptable, as far as I am concerned. I want to see those vulnerable people, who have come here seeking our support and help, located in Achill Island. I sincerely hope that whatever the difficulties are, they will be resolved such that the ladies in question will be able to go to Achill Island, where I have no doubt the majority of the islanders will welcome them with open arms. We have seen a deterioration in regard to this issue that is extremely worrying and, as a Member of this House and as a citizen of Ireland, I am very uncomfortable with it.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I welcome Deputy Eamon Ryan to the Gallery.

Senator Paul Gavan: I welcome Senator Hackett and her family to the House today. It is great to have another progressive voice in the Chamber. Sinn Féin looks forward to working

with her.

I commend colleagues who have spoken out about University Hospital Limerick. What was not mentioned but I suspect is probably known, is that at the heart of this issue is a major problem with management at the hospital. We need to be straight and call that out.

Senator Martin Conway: I agree.

Senator Paul Gavan: I am calling today for a further debate on Shannon Airport, in particular in light of the visit two weeks to these buildings by Major Ken Mayers and Tarak Kauff, a former US paratrooper. I am glad to say they received a tremendously warm reception. Ken is 82 years old and Tarak is 77. Since engaging in a peaceful protest on St. Patrick's Day, they have been on bail; their passports have been taken from them and they are unable to return home. The manner in which they have been treated by this State is nothing less than disgraceful.

Senator Máire Devine: Hear, hear.

Senator Paul Gavan: It was wonderful to see people from every party, except one, stand with them when they came into the House. I regret that it was the Fine Gael Party that did not engage in support of these people. I note my colleagues from the mid-west are here. The good news is that there is another opportunity for them to do so this Friday at Ennis Circuit Court, where the latest hearing for these two fine, brave men will take place at 10.30 a.m. The men are applying for their trial to be transferred to Dublin. They cannot get a change in their bail conditions until that is agreed. What they have met to date is postponement after postponement. What the State is doing is, effectively, incarcerating these two fine men with a combined age of close to 160 in Ireland. This is being done because these men stood up and said what everyone knows to be the case, namely, that there is something terrible happening in Shannon day after day. There are US wars of aggression all across the Middle East, in Yemen, Afghanistan and Iraq and we are supporting those wars. Nobody on the other side of the Chamber has ever stood up and announced that we are doing the right thing in supporting what the US is doing at our airport because they cannot. There is no defence for what is happening in Shannon. Senators are remaining silent about the prospect of these two fine men facing Christmas without being able to go home to their families. Surely to God we can all agree that the State should allow them to go home to their families. We should all agree to recognise the wrong that has been done to them. I encourage Senators to come along to Ennis at 10.30 a.m. this Friday. In common with a number of other people, I will be there to support Ken and Tarak by standing up and saying that justice should be done for these two fine men.

Senator Catherine Noone: I welcome Senator Pippa Hackett to the Chamber. It is a happy and proud day for the Senator and her family. I wish her well.

I join other Senators in condemning what happened with Deputy Martin Kenny. It is absolutely abhorrent that his car was burned and his family was frightened. It really disgusts me. I spoke to the Deputy earlier. He has young teenagers who understand the danger. It is such a difficult situation. We have all become used to the negativity and the abuse we get online. When it comes to our homes and our families, it is a different story. I think we all have to speak out against that. We all disagree on occasion - I suppose we agree on occasion - but at the end of the day, this type of intimidating criminal behaviour should not be tolerated in a democracy.

I seek a debate on the report on State-funded contraception, which follows on from a request

made by the Minister for Health. There is a lot of detail in the report. There has been a great deal of media discussion on what is being proposed. People have debated whether long-acting contraceptives should be provided and what age groups should be involved. The provision of State-funded contraception was one of the fundamental ancillary recommendations of the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution. Obviously, this recommendation must be a fundamental part of our efforts to avoid unwanted and crisis pregnancies. I am seeking a debate in the House on this topic as soon as possible.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: I join my colleagues in welcoming Senator Pippa Hackett to the House this afternoon. I had the pleasure of meeting Senator Hackett, her husband and her two children earlier today. I also welcome Deputy Catherine Martin, who comes from Carrickmacross, County Monaghan, to the Gallery. Their party leader, Deputy Eamon Ryan, is also present. Senator Hackett is in very good company. This is a proud day for the Senator and her family. I hope she enjoys the rest of the day and the rest of her term in the Seanad.

I wish to join other Senators in mentioning the Cuisle respite centre in County Roscommon. I remind those who wonder why someone from the Cavan-Monaghan constituency would discuss a centre in Roscommon that the users of this facility come from all over the country. Indeed, I was contacted yesterday by people from Tydavnet, County Monaghan, who wanted to express their sadness, disappointment and annoyance that this much-loved facility is due to close at the end of this month. They told me of the joy they experienced when they availed of the respite services at the Cuisle facility. They spoke about the kindness and understanding shown by the staff to the people who stay there. This facility has given many families throughout the country their only possibility of respite. It has specialised equipment to cater for the needs of their loved ones. Needless to say, they are heartbroken about its proposed closure. As others have said, this facility has been open since 1997. I understand that issues have arisen on foot of a structural survey of the building, which appears to have highlighted a number of issues. I am sure the Leader will agree that none of these issues should be insurmountable. I ask him to use his good offices to ask the Minister for Health to intervene in this issue. Between 45 and 48 people are employed in this centre. On behalf of all the people who have had joyful and happy experiences when they have visited the centre, I put it to the Leader that the problems which exist at the centre can be surmounted with the goodwill of all parties. I have no doubt that a solution can be worked out over time. The facility should remain in place for all the people throughout the country who avail of it.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Deputy Catherine Martin is very welcome to the Chamber.

Senator Michael McDowell: I too welcome Senator Hackett and acknowledge the presence until a moment ago of the leader of her party, Deputy Eamon Ryan. I am glad that she is already showing independence of mind and is against car-pooling. I anticipate that she will not be in favour of rewilding to the extent of the reintroduction of wolves.

Senator Lynn Ruane: Senator McDowell has certainly gone for her.

Senator Michael McDowell: Leinster House has already been rewilded. There are quite a few wolves prowling its corridors and many of them are in sheep's clothing.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: The Senator can say that again.

Senator Michael McDowell: I wish to address the issue of direct provision centres. This House needs to have a serious debate on this issue. It is very easy to virtue signal on this issue

and state that one is against a particular thing. A woman stated on the radio on Sunday that she disapproves of the centres. When asked by Brendan O'Connor for an alternative to them, she said, "Well, that is the difficulty." This country must be realistic and truthful. We cannot, at a time of housing shortage, simply say that every applicant for asylum goes to the top of the housing list. In the present circumstances, we cannot say that everybody who comes from Albania, Georgia or elsewhere and applies for asylum automatically becomes entitled to full social welfare. It is naive to think that such a regime could be put in place. We need a real discussion on what is wrong with our current system and why it is so unfair to so many people.

The real cause of injustice is that we are failing to deal in a timely manner with applicants for asylum. It is absurd that it can take years to go through the process. Either people are entitled, *prima facie*, to asylum protection or they are not. The second thing about which we must be honest is the economic migrancy. It is not the same as asylum-seeking. Although many of us will see similarities between the plight of the Irish going on coffin ships in the 19th century and some of the people getting onto RIBs to cross the Mediterranean in the present day, we must be truthful that economic migrancy is something which must be dealt with by the law and through legal processes. It is not a question of simply turning a blind eye to the difference between the entitlement to refugee protection and the need for the State to be clear that it is a cause of concern that so many people from places such as Georgia and Albania - both of which are trying to get into the EU and are safe countries - have suddenly applied for refugee status. The real reason is that it is our own fault that we have a system which entertains delay and creates the opportunity for people to pose as refugees for a long time when, in fact-----

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins: Every person is entitled to seek refugee status.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator McDowell without interruption.

Senator Michael McDowell: I will make my remarks though the Chair to be orderly. Of course, every person is entitled to seek refugee status if he or she is a genuine refugee. There are safe countries and presumptions. There must be some realism on this matter. Senator Higgins should know that many people posing as refugee applicants are, in fact, migrants. They are escaping poverty. I have no difficulty with what is driving them, but these are not genuine refugee applications.

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins: They may apply under international law.

Senator Michael McDowell: The Senator's heart may be in the right place. I have seen the files, however, and I know what I am talking about. We need a genuine debate in this House about the difference between migrancy and refugee status. We need a real debate about where and how we will accommodate asylum seekers. In what locations, in what buildings, in what facilities and with what supports will we accommodate asylum seekers? These things have to be discussed honestly. It is about time people stopped the virtue signalling and started talking about real solutions to real problems, including the culpability of the Irish State, which is not of this Government's making, but it is a long-standing problem with delays in this area.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh an Seanadóir Hackett fosta. I acknowledge and thank colleagues for their solidarity and support for our colleague, Deputy Martin Kenny. Deputy Martin Kenny will not be deterred by this, as troubling and concerning as it is. While I disagree with a lot of the sentiment expressed by Senator McDowell, I agree with him in that I want to have the debate about direct provision. I want to have the

debate about the failure to deal with the facilities, the processes, the needs and the care that are required by the people who are coming to this State to seek refuge. I want to talk about the rise of the right in this State. I want to talk about how it is able to exploit the economic, ideology-driven decisions that are causing poverty and deprivation in this State, which is ripe and fertile ground for the right to exploit. I want to talk about that in the course of that debate.

I also want to talk about what Senator Gavan said about the use of Shannon Airport to displace a lot of these people from the Middle East. I want to talk about why the Irish Defence Forces are moving from search and rescue work in the Mediterranean and drifting ever closer towards participating in a European army. I want to talk about all of that in the round and I want to particularly afford everybody in this House the opportunity to take a stand, like Deputy Martin Kenny, in support of people who are vulnerable and who are coming to this State to flee some of the awful devastation being inflicted upon people around the world, much of it via Shannon Airport, to our shame.

I want to commend the latest initiative from Ireland's Future yesterday. Over 1,000 signatories from the civic world, political life, academia, the arts and sport came together, in this State this time, to respectfully ask the Government to prepare for new constitutional horizons and not to fall into the Brexit trap of constitutional change coming about in an ill-prepared or ill-informed manner. It is a responsible and prudent call and it is the right thing to do. It is a conversation within broader Irish life that mirrors the conversations that are happening in board rooms, club rooms and even in this Chamber on occasion, that identify the real need to have an inclusive, engaged and informed conversation about where we want to be. The Constitution compels us to do that and the Good Friday Agreement allows us and affords us the opportunity to deliver that for people. Tús maith leath na hoibre, a good start is half the work. I want today to reiterate that call from Ireland's Future through the Leader. It was yet another impressive initiative calling on the Government to get ready.

Senator Paul Gavan: Well said.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I was not going to speak but after Senator McDowell's contribution I would like to add to his call for a debate, which is needed. It was announced that a group is being set up to examine direct provision. When I looked at in the budget, however, one thing Senator McDowell is right about is-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: We are not going to have a debate now.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I know but the Senator spoke about a system whereby we would assess people in a speedy and orderly fashion. When I looked at the budget this year, straight away I saw there was a 1% increase on the last budget in respect of how much would be spent on the system to move people through the asylum process. If we were really committed to addressing people's assessment for asylum, we would have seen a much larger increase than 1%. We need to have a conversation about this issue. Not enough has been said here today about the Taoiseach's comments in the paper when let run without somebody telling him what to say. His views became very clear on a number of issues but one of them was on direct provision. I am not going to refer to the nationalities he spoke about but to a phrase he used in one of those sections, that we cannot give everybody free houses. Not only is he not fixing the direct provision centre issue, he is also using a term that is coined all the time against working class people in terms of being able to access social housing. He is purposely trying to pit direct provision against ordinary people in the housing system. That cannot be a conversation that is allowed

be had.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: Hear, hear.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I do not think when we have the conversation about direct provision that we should be talking about the housing shortage. The housing shortage is an issue in itself that we need to address but we cannot pit people against each other when we are talking about the demand for housing. I want to make sure that message is very clear. I call on the Leader to arrange statements and a debate on direct provision.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: Like the last speaker, I had not intended to contribute but came in to welcome our new colleague. However, Senator McDowell is to be complimented on raising a very big subject here. Before we all get into our various boxes on the left and on the right, we should pause and stand back and look at some of the points he has made. My instinct is probably not the same as his on this issue. We in Ireland have vast experience of being accommodated and welcomed in many countries abroad. Certainly some of our emigrants were asylum seekers. In the days of the Fenians we were looked after in Paris and other places like that. However, the vast majority of our emigrants were economic emigrants. They went to Australia, England and America to better themselves financially and we should bear that in mind as well. Whatever I would say on the subject, I abhor totally the unlawful attack on the home of Deputy Martin Kenny, who is a fine Member of these Houses and who is highly respected. We cannot tolerate that. For the life of me, I am not a holy Joe but I think there is some Christianity in all of us and we have to do the best we can for people in this unfortunate plight. I really do not understand in my heart how some people in Christian Ireland are responding - minorities really - in the way they are. I am not saying it should be someplace else. Kerry has done well in this and we have a good record, as the Leas-Chathaoirleach knows. If they come to my town, I assure the House that they will be welcome there. Certainly keep the numbers tidy and small and have a nice separation but that is not what I came in here to say.

I warmly welcome Senator Hackett to the Chamber and I compliment her. It is a great honour for herself and her family to come to Oireachtas Éireann. I welcome her family and members of the Green Party. I compliment her colleagues in the Civic Engagement Group, with whom I agree most of the time. There is a certain issue in Ballylongford which I will be talking about here tomorrow and on which we cannot agree. Senator Hackett’s tenure cannot be too long but it will not be as short as people think. My money is on around March 2021.

Senator Rónán Mullen: Ba bhreá liom freisin fáilte a chur roimh an Seanadóir Hackett. Tá súil agam go mbainfidh sí taitneamh agus tairbhe as a tréimhse anseo, cibé fhad a bheas aici. Cuirim fáilte roimh a fear céile agus a cuid páistí dar nóigh. Táimid ag súil le oibriú léi chun leas na tíre.

I welcome the debate that Senator McDowell so eloquently requested. As somebody who has always supported a structured but generous accommodation not just of asylum seekers but of economic migrants, I really think it is important that we do not hear phrases like “nothing can be said in these Houses”. This debate suffers from a lack of intellectual honesty and when people are being accused of gaslighting the minute they raise an issue that others disagree with, it closes down debate. It is extraordinarily unhelpful and colleagues are not going to persuade people who are reluctant by being so judgmental of their fears and feelings. That seems to me to be obvious.

If I may, I want to return to the nostalgia that many people are feeling in these days and that has been expressed in this House with the sad news of the passing of Gay Byrne. He played a huge role in Irish life, as we all know, and in saying farewell to him, people are saying farewell to a part of their own lives and a part of our past. For most people, the memory of times past is a memory of happy times. There is also gratitude because Gay and his team did so much to entertain, inform and educate the nation. He was a brilliant broadcaster and communicator at a time when, all over the western world, what was previously private was rapidly being made public. He exemplified and symbolised that new public expression. He and his team shone a light into dark corners of our society at a time when others found that threatening. However, we must never forget that the same dark corners existed in every society, and we still have dark corners in our society today. Indeed, the nostalgia that people feel today reflects the fact that the Ireland that Gay Byrne explored and reflected back to itself was mostly a happy one. I would like RTÉ to consider a systematic and unedited rebroadcasting of the extensive series of episodes of “The Late Late Show”, because it would make for interesting and very valuable social history.

The work that others did with the material that Gay and his team brought to light reflected various agendas, some good and some bad. Some of that work ended injustices and some of it sadly contributed to the dark corners that exist in our society today. However that is often the case with the legacy of great figures. Today we pay our respects to a consummate professional, to the most effective broadcaster of his generation and to someone who affected all our lives and created so many lasting memories. Ar dheis Dé go raibh sé and to his family our deep sympathy.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Does Senator Colette Kelleher wish to comment?

Senator Colette Kelleher: I was not going to speak but we need an honest debate in this House about asylum, refugees and economic migrants. That debate has to be framed by the notion and the belief that diversity is a positive thing and not de facto a negative thing. We should have our conversations and discussions in that light. I was an economic migrant for 17 years. I never felt like and never was a burden on the country in which I worked. People seek asylum and flee countries for a variety of reasons. Some are to do with wars, despots and people destroying their own people in a fashion that none of us here can possibly imagine. People also leave for other reasons. People left Ireland in the 1950s and went to other places because they were gay. I know for a fact that women leave countries that are considered to be welcoming and not in difficulty because they are experiencing domestic violence. We need to understand and have this debate in its fullness. I pay tribute to my own home town of Macroom, which has stretched out the hand of friendship, as it rightly should, to people seeking asylum who are living in direct provision centres there. Rural Ireland is not all one and the same. We need to promote the positives as well as the negatives. Once that debate is respectful, I am happy to have it. We should not slice and dice between genuine and non-genuine asylum seekers, or pit local people facing a housing crisis against people who are coming to the country for the refuge which we rightly offer and to which end we have signed international obligations. Once we have that understanding, I am very happy for us to have this debate. If we do not have that, it will be a waste of time. It will just fuel the rhetoric that can be found at times outside this House and that leads to the kind of horrible experiences recently undergone by Deputy Martin Kenny and his family.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I now have the pleasure of calling on Senator Pippa Hackett.

Senator Pippa Hackett: I thank the Leas-Chathaoirleach for the warm welcome and all

the Senators for their messages and words of support. It is a real honour for me to take up this seat in Seanad Éireann. I am grateful to the Green Party for selecting me for the by-election and to all the Senators and Deputies who nominated me to contest it. Yesterday, I enjoyed a wonderful tour of this Chamber and its surrounds given by the Clerk of the Seanad, Mr. Martin Groves, and the Clerk Assistant, Ms Bridget Doody. I thank them for that. It was lovely. I also thank all the ushers and staff who also have been very kind and welcoming. I look forward to working with all the Members in this House over the next few months, which I hope will be a good few months. I am particularly delighted to join with the Civil Engagement group, comprising Senators Higgins, Ruane, Kelleher, Black and Dolan. I recognise the direction of the group and the work they do and I hope I can contribute to that.

This is an immensely proud day for myself and for my family, particularly my husband, Mark, and my children, Heidi, George, Charlie and Poppy. I thank my parents, Jeannie and Lucien, for their love and support. I want to remember their son and my only sibling, Jay, who passed away only a few months ago. It is a quite emotional time for them.

Finally, I acknowledge my predecessor, Grace O'Sullivan, who is now a Member of the European Parliament. It was Grace who gave me my first look inside this historic building, shortly after her election to the Seanad in 2016. I have followed her progress closely. She has asked me for help and I have been willing to give it. I very much enjoyed working with her and seeing how she worked with the Civil Engagement group. She has been an inspiration to me to get involved in politics up to this level. I also look forward to working with my Green Party colleagues in Leinster House, namely, Deputies Eamon Ryan and Catherine Martin. I acknowledge my colleagues around the country, where we have a large number of councillors. I would love to work with them to build a better, greener future for our wonderful country.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I dtús báire, ar mo shon féin agus ar son Fhine Gael, cuirim fáilte mhór roimh an Seanadóir nua, Pippa Hackett. Déanaim comhghairdeas léi. In congratulating Senator Hackett, I welcome her on behalf of all of us to the House. I pay tribute to her two children, Heidi and George, for their endurance in what has been a test of strength for them in the House this afternoon. I also pay tribute to her husband, Mark. Today is a very proud day for the Senator and her family and I wish her every success in her term, whether it is to 2021 or to February, March, April or May.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: I have not been wrong yet.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: True.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: Has the coalition agreed a date?

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: Watch this space.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Senator Hackett's maiden speech as a Member of this House is one she can look back on with pride. She is serving not just the people of Offaly but the people of Ireland. She has come on a huge journey as the first Green Party councillor elected in Offaly last year and I certainly hope she will not displace our Deputy, Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, in Offaly in the general election.

The vast majority of the House paid tribute to the late Gay Byrne, who tragically passed away yesterday. Many eloquent words have been spoken by many Members, in particular Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell, on the prowess which Gay Byrne had as a broadcaster. This

morning, Sean O'Rourke summed it up pretty well when he said we were all part of a national wake remembering, commemorating and celebrating the life of a broadcaster who, despite the comments of some, shone a light into dark corners, opened up a window for many in our country and gave a voice to those who were voiceless. The letters written to radio stations from people across the country give a powerful reminder of Gay Byrne. I remind the House that the late John Charles McQuaid had the temerity to write to RTÉ to say he was in charge of what RTÉ could broadcast in the context of Gay Byrne. How we have travelled as a country. Gay Byrne was part of that journey, along with others. He was an enlightened man and one who gave people a voice but he was also a broadcaster. We use the phrase "ní bheidh a leithéid arís ann" far too easily but it is true. He was the first. He was iconic. As Senator Mullen said, there were some who agreed with him and some who did not agree with him. That is the democracy and the Republic in which we live. We pay tribute to him and thank him for his service to the Irish people. We thank his wife and his two daughters for allowing us to live our lives with him. We hope that in their time of mourning and sorrow they will remember the good Gay Byrne brought to the lives of so many people but also that they will be comforted by the prayers and the thoughts of the people of Ireland. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

I welcome Senator Ardagh back to the House and wish her well in her pregnancy and remaining time with us. I sincerely wish her every success. She referred to the issue of housing. It is a vexing issue. As she knows well, in the city of Dublin, in the first six months of this year, presentations of families who are homeless have fallen by 9.5%. One in two of the families presenting to homeless services were prevented from having to enter emergency accommodation and the number of families entering emergency accommodation has fallen by 5%. Some 786 families have exited emergency accommodation to a home. That is a 48% increase on the 530 exits recorded from the same period in 2018. Of course, we do not hear some of those facts. We accept there is an issue with housing and supply. The Government is committed under Rebuilding Ireland 2040 to pursue that in terms of tackling the issue of homelessness.

Senator Norris raised the issue of privatisation. Yet again, the issue of seagulls has dominated the Order of Business in the House. The issue of waste collection is one that has been well debated and documented across every local authority in the country. It is not my intention to revisit it.

Senator Higgins made reference to the issue of the debate on the report on adoption transparency I would be happy to facilitate that debate. The Ceann Comhairle has ruled on the matter regarding the money message. I will not delve into that here today.

Senators Hopkins, Leyden and Gallagher raised the issue of Cuisle. Unlike Senator Leyden, I am aware Senator Hopkins has been in contact, had her phone answered, has had meetings and has been in here raising the matter-----

Senator Terry Leyden: I hope to God she gets results.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Order. Allow the Leader to continue without interruption.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: -----which, as Senator Leyden knows quite well, is a matter for the Irish Wheelchair Association.

Senator Terry Leyden: I was at a public meeting in Cuisle last night.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: To be fair, the matter is-----

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Senator Terry Leyden: That is discrimination by the Irish Wheelchair Association in calling one Senator and not the other.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator has made his contribution. Allow the Leader to continue without interruption.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: There seems to be an issue with Roscommon politicians and telephones. I remember another former Roscommon politician talking about putting his sweet lips a little closer to the phone but the Senator could come back to that later.

Senator Terry Leyden: Cheap shots do not work.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I made no cheap shot. The Senator is well able to give it. If he cannot take it-----

Senator Terry Leyden: I am well able to take it.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: -----he should not bother giving it.

Senator Terry Leyden: I can take it and I can throw it back too.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: Is the Senator's disagreement with coalition?

Senator Terry Leyden: The Leader need not worry about that.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Order, please.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Despite Senator Leyden's attempt at being frivolous, the issue raised by the Senators is a very serious matter. It is one of respite care for people who require care.

Senator Terry Leyden: And holidays.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: People sometimes use the word "holiday" which is a mistaken word with respect to respite care. It is not a holiday. For those people who require 24-hour care, and the Senator might not like my answer-----

Senator Terry Leyden: It is a holiday camp.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: We are not having a private debate. I ask the Leader to address his remarks through the Chair. He is responding to the Order of Business.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I am.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Leader should not pick up on any points made by way of interruption.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Would the Leas-Chathaoirleach like to take the Leader's job as well?

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I wish the Leader would respond without reference to any interruptions he is getting.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I am trying to do the best I can.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: We are all a little testy today.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I am not.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I am actually in great form. I am not in bad form at all.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: We are well over time and a Minister is waiting to come into the House.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: With respect, the Order of Business-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: It was extremely lengthy.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I accept that but I was not chairing it.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: We had the maximum number of contributors.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The points made by Senators Leyden, Hopkins and Gallagher are very serious. The issue of respite care and of providing care for people is one we should take seriously.

To be of assistance to Senator Leyden, I suggest the Senators table a Commencement matter on the issue for next Tuesday depending on the outcome of their meeting tomorrow.

Senator Craughwell raised the issue of the Lisa Smith case and an article published in the *Sunday World*. As the Senator will be aware, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade made reference to this in a statement subsequent to the RTÉ and TV3 coverage and 5 o'clock the newspaper report, he was of the view that a resolution to the matter was nowhere near. The Government does not comment on individual cases and it has not done so, as the Senator will well know. He is being mischievous around the issue of-----

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: No. It is about the leaking of the story. We need to find out who leaked it.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I have no information on that.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: Does the Leader condemn it?

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Order, please.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The issue of our Army rangers is an important one. They undergo operations in absolute secrecy and it is important they are allowed to do that. The Tánaiste's statement reinforces that viewpoint.

Senators Richmond, Murnane O'Connor and Byrne paid tribute to the Irish ladies' hockey team and we congratulate on qualifying for the Tokyo Olympic Games. We wish them well. We are delighted we have new heroes on the pitch. I would have happy to arrange for a debate on sport and women in sport.

Senators Devine, Byrne and Conway raised the issue of overcrowding in our hospital emergency departments and, in particular, the number of people on trolleys. Whether it be one person or many people being treated on trolleys, it is one person too many. I have stated here previously the management of people on trolleys and our hospitals seems to be a major issue. I think there is a game going on in our health system. Vested interests are taking our patients,

who should be at the centre of care in our health system, and are relegating them as part of a game-----

Senator Máire Devine: Should we stop telling the truth?

Senator Jerry Buttimer: -----and it should stop immediately. It is unfair to the families concerned and to the patients being treated on trolleys. We need to fundamentally tackle the issue of patient discharges. We all welcome the new 60-bed unit being built in Limerick, which will assist in that respect. There is a need to deal with the issue of patient discharges and the provision of a continuum of care in our communities.

Senator Devine also raised the issue of a Tusla report dealing with the number of students missing school. I would be happy to arrange a debate on that issue in due course.

A number of Senators raised the matter of direct provision, as linked to the attack on the home of Deputy Martin Kenny, as well as the issue itself. Senators Feighan, Conway, McDowell, Ó Donnghaile, Ruane, Mullen and Kelleher raised the issue. On my own behalf and on behalf of the House, I condemn those who attacked Deputy Martin Kenny's car and his family. It has no place in a democratic society. Everybody should stand firm in upholding the law and standing with Deputy Martin Kenny and his family, and any Member of the House, regarding the matter of an attack. The perpetrators of this crime are from a community. They are known. People should come forward with that information.

The issue of direct provision is a contentious one but it need not necessarily be one. Senator McDowell in a powerful presentation, raised a number of valid points with which I might not agree. We are an Ireland of welcomes, we have international obligations but it is time we had a national conversation on direct provision. As a former Minister for Justice and a former Attorney General, the Senator knows quite well that there is a system in place but the process takes time and it is a somewhat cumbersome. We all wish it was quicker because we all have people who come into our offices every week who are seeking asylum, have had their application refused or have submitted an appeal and the process goes on and on. These people's applications, in many cases, are worthy and they are genuine people who left their country out of fear. There are others, which Senator McDowell is right in saying, who are here chancing their arm, and we should say that too. I am somebody who is very much in favour of asylum seekers and of having the matter dealt with in a humane and fair way. A debate on this issue is very much needed. We should stand firm in our opposition to those who oppose direct provision facilities being put in places around our country. Senator Kelleher is right. There are places like Macroom and Drishane in Cork where communities within communities are being formed and friendships and new families are being created. Direct provision and our new immigrant communities are welcome in our country.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Absolutely.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: We should all stand up and say that. Those who oppose them are doing so in many cases out of ignorance or are trying to create fear in our country, and that has no place here.

Senator Murnane O'Connor raised the issue of home buyers. If she has the information she referenced, she should give it to the Garda or the Minister because what she set out is illegal.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I have spoken to the Minister.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I would ask the Senator to name the people in the Chamber where she would have immunity in doing that because we should not condone that kind of behaviour in any shape or form.

Senator Boyhan raised the issue of the Shane O'Farrell case. Senator Norris also has raised the case here previously. First, we send our condolences to the family of Shane O'Farrell on his tragic death and, second, we all agree there is a need for answers. The case was the subject of a Dáil motion and a motion in this House and the Minister sought the advice of the Attorney General on how best to proceed with the case, given that the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission was at the time still investigating the matter. The Minister, Deputy Flanagan, appointed a retired judge, Judge Gerard Haughton, to conduct a scoping exercise. I understand, but am open to correction on this, that this scoping exercise is still continuing. The family has been met and some changes have been suggested to the Minister, Deputy Flanagan, in terms of a proposed change to the terms of reference of the scoping exercise. I hope that in time, the recommendations will be able to be debated and that Judge Haughton will be able to continue his work. Following that, we can make a decision based on the outcome of that work.

Senator Gavan raised the issue of Shannon Airport. I would be happy to have a debate on the matter in the House at any time.

Senator Noone raised the issue of a report on State-funded contraception which, again, is an very important one. I would happy to ask the Minister to come into the House regarding the matter.

Senator Ó Donnghaile raised the issue of civic groups coming together yesterday in terms of the 1,000 signatories. It is important we plan for the future of our island.

I express my sympathy and that of the House to the family of the late Fr. Des Wilson, who died today in Belfast. He was a very strong powerful voice within our country. He was a person who tried to build bridges rather than take down bridges and he was very committed to his people.

I again welcome Senator Hackett to the House. I thank Members for their contributions.

As a measure of our support for and in expressing our sympathy to the family of the late Gay Byrne, I propose we stand for a minute's silence at the end of the Order of Business if that is agreeable.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

We will stand in respectful silence for a minute.

Members rose.

Order of Business agreed to.

Climate Action: Statements

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerard P. Craughwell): I welcome the Minister for Commu-

nications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Bruton, to the House.

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I will go through the developments since we last spoke. As Members are aware, we produced an ambitious climate action plan in June of this year. To illustrate the level of ambition, it is worth explaining to Senators that we must achieve very significant changes if this is to be developed. Over the next ten years, we need to have five times as much renewables as we have today. That will be a very significant expansion of infrastructure. We need to have ten times as much retrofitting expenditure as we have today. We need to have 25 times the level of new purchases of electric vehicles that we have today. We need to see 500,000 extra people using public transport or active transport. We need to see 250 million trees planted. We need to see five times the number of sustainable energy communities. We need to see zero non-recyclable plastic. At the moment, two thirds of our plastic is non-recyclable. That gives Members some impression of the really significant step up that we are asking people to make.

Senators will agree that we have built on solid foundations in having had the Citizens' Assembly on climate change followed by the Oireachtas work on climate and that has given a consensus around the legal framework that we need to put in place. There has been universal support for the report of the all-party Oireachtas committee. We have also embedded the action plan in an oversight process that I think has been proven. I worked on the Action Plan for Jobs, which was driven from the Taoiseach's office and which created a sense of momentum right across the Government to deliver on what was then the top national priority, namely, to get people back to work. Now our top national priority is to confront climate decay and, again, the same approach is at the heart of this model.

We can do great work here and design a wonderful model in Kildare Street, Merrion Street, Adelaide Road or whatever street one wishes to pick, where a lot of effort has gone into designing what it is we have to do but this will only happen if we can bring about a lot of deep-seated changes in the wider community, economic sectors and homes, among other areas. It does require us to start thinking about changing the habits of a lifetime in terms of how we travel, how we heat our homes and about the priorities we set, which is difficult for people. It also means we have to accept infrastructures that we have not been used to. In every town and village, people are quite used to having a flammable liquid buried in a hole in the ground and people do not bat an eyelid at that, but we find it hard to adjust to the idea that there will have to be wind farms, solar farms, infrastructure to build interconnection, and a strengthened grid. There is a significant infrastructural change that we have to get our heads around as a community. A big part of that will be community involvement in practical terms and in terms of an opportunity to share in the benefits and to see community gain at local level and for communities themselves to get into the renewable energy business.

There is also no mistaking that we have to mobilise a lot of capital. Internationally, it is judged that we need to mobilise about 1% of GDP, which is a lot of money every year, probably about €30 billion, to address the climate challenge. That will not all come from the Government. It is about helping businesses, farms, enterprises and homes to be able to fund the changes. The encouraging part is that most of the changes pay for themselves. They are right things to do if we were not having a climate challenge but, nonetheless, they often have significant upfront costs and we must devise models in particular for homeowners. We can have an aggregated model where people do not have to think it all out for themselves, get their own advice, get their own contractor and make their own decisions. It must be made easy for them and funding should be easy to get. We are working to do that sort of aggregation. Right

throughout we will need to mobilise capital. The process must be seen to be fair. This transition is immense. We are moving completely away from fossil fuels over a relatively short period. We must make sure that those who are least equipped to make the change and those who are most exposed are helped through the transition. That is why it is so important that there is fairness in the transition, both in assisting those who are least equipped and helping those who are most exposed, such as, in immediate terms, workers in Bord na Móna. That is really crucial to getting this right.

We need leadership at every level, in every business, in every sector and at community level. The sustainable energy communities are a really effective way of getting that. A lot of people are getting involved, with 300 in place already. It builds the bridge between the Government policy - with all the good things we are trying to do - and people, so there is a sense of inclusion. We are very much aware of that.

We are also very much aware that we must have citizen engagement, in particular with young people. A whole day was devoted to young people at the UN conference I attended in New York. As someone said, young people are 25% of the present but they are 100% of the future, so the decisions we make are absolutely central to their future and we must include them. We need to think about how we do that. I have been doing roadshows myself since I launched the plan. I recently had one in a school devoted exclusively to students from schools in the locality. It was remarkable how well informed they were and what good suggestions were coming forward. It pays for us to listen.

Before I hear the views of Senators, the final point I wish to make is that I think significant progress has been made since we launched in June. We have joined the ambitious member states within the European Union that are pressing for carbon neutrality in Europe, a near-zero approach. Members are probably aware that a number of countries are holding out against that but the momentum is very clear that it is the direction of travel for the European Union for 2050. We have delivered 85% of the elements that were to be delivered in the first two quarters of the programme. It is not a perfect delivery but it represents good progress and real work is going in to make this a reality. We have seen adaptation plans in all nine of the critical areas where we have infrastructure exposed to the impacts of climate. We have seen 31 local authorities adopt their own climate charter, whereby every single local authority is now building into its own thinking how it impacts on climate and how it uses public procurement to influence suppliers, how it supports its clients, such as local authority householders, and how it integrates it into its planning decisions, among other areas. It is a really important part of making this happen at community level. We have had the budget, in which for the first time we have seen a clear trajectory for carbon price, where the Government has announced we will move on a gradual basis to a carbon price of €80 per tonne. As Professor John FitzGerald, the chairman of the Climate Change Advisory Council has said, no country, including Ireland, could have hoped to achieve the carbon targets we have set without using price because price is about asking people to pay for the damage they inadvertently do by their practices. Carbon price is an important part of it. The ESRI estimates that carbon pricing on its own would reduce our emissions by 15% by 2030. That represents nearly half of what we have to achieve. The way it impacts will be seen through the decisions people make in their homes, about their cars and about so many other things. It is important that everyone recognises that we have to price the damage. Just as the polluter pays principle has been at the heart of a lot of good policymaking, carbon pricing has to be at the heart of confronting the impact of carbon on our community.

The other essential element is that every cent of that is ploughed back into helping and

empowering communities to make the changes they need to make. The way we structure that, as Senators probably know, is in three strands. First, we must help the people who are least equipped. These are people in fuel poverty and not only have we increased the fuel grant so there is an extra €2 per week during the winter months but we have doubled the expenditure on the warmer home scheme. The warmer home scheme is the 100% grant scheme in which we support people on low incomes with poor heating systems to make significant changes. Not only should we support them on the cost of their fuel today but we should put in place a system whereby on average they will save around €1,200 a year from a significant retrofit. It is really worthwhile.

Second is just transition. We have devoted significant moneys in this first round to just transition. Significantly, that is made up of €5 million for restoring bogs that are not in Bord na Móna ownership, €6 million for a just transition fund and €20 million to create an aggregated retrofitting model in the midlands. This will be aimed at mobilising the sort of work we need to do on an area basis in the midlands, looking at particular areas and starting with the social homes to ensure that those who are living in social homes and are on low incomes get an opportunity to upgrade. Also, off the shoulder of that we must include other families that can engage in an upgraded system. We are designing that plan and want to roll it out as quickly as possible. Third, we must increase our expenditure on all the various schemes, such as sustaining the electric vehicle subsidy, doubling the amount of public chargers for electric vehicles, increasing the amount of money devoted to all the adaptation grants that are available for retrofitting homes and so on. Every cent of that money is being ploughed back to ensure we get that mobilisation.

I am reporting progress almost six months in to say the train has moved from the station. We have real momentum and support in the wider community. People will be worried about the impact it may have on their sector and we have to work through that but there is a genuine willingness for people to get involved in this. It strikes me as similar to many of the big constitutional changes we have managed to make in this country. The reason older people like myself, although I do not feel like I am in that category, have changed their minds on a lot of these big constitutional issues is because younger people have changed and influenced the way we think about them. This is very much true in the case of the climate debate and the challenges we have here. Younger people are influencing our generation and rightly pointing the finger at us that we are the generation who will pass on this globe in a worse condition than we found it. We will be the first generation to have done that and we have huge responsibility to build the momentum around this plan and to deliver it for our children and for the generations after them.

Senator Terry Leyden: I welcome the Minister to the House. He is maturing with age and he is prepared to listen, hear, understand and hopefully, implement. Fianna Fáil fully recognises the climate crisis is the defining global challenge of our time and we are committed to ensuring Ireland does its collective fair share and meets legally binding commitments at European Union and United Nations levels. It is only right that this House has the opportunity to address all aspects of this Government's climate response, or to be more accurate, the opportunity to address the Government's knowing indecision and to delay anything approaching a co-ordinated and satisfactory climate response.

Ireland's climate laggard status relates back to the 2012 Fine Gael decision to abandon climate action legislation proposed by the Green Party and Fianna Fáil and the subsequent knowing failure to introduce any sort of coherent climate plan until this year. The new climate plan may result in some concrete action, following the Trojan work of the Citizens' Assembly and the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Climate Action. The Oireachtas committee was absolutely

clear that both Houses of the Oireachtas have an important role to play in terms of instilling discipline and ending years of Government inaction.

However, there are notable gaps between committee recommendations and Government commitments in its climate plan. I want to address four issues if I have the opportunity and it would be helpful if the Minister could respond to each issue in due course or at least consider them. First are the Taoiseach's comments. Last week, the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, and Ministers were throwing around pumpkins at a press launch of their quarterly report on actions implemented by Departments. I will not be calling it a progress report as it is far from clear emissions are being reduced. In contrast with the serious and respectful approach of the Oireachtas joint committee, it was shocking that the Government continues to treat the climate emergency in such a trivial way. In terms of this published quarterly report, Departments are to be commended on transparently reporting on their commitments, as well as on their work on adaptation plans but how does such a ridiculous photo opportunity appear to the peat workers who stand the loss of the only jobs they have ever known, to the farmer whose potato crop has been destroyed by the extreme rainfall of recent weeks, or to those with respiratory problems made worse by air pollution? There are those in government who wonder why we have children striking about these matters. To top it all, the Taoiseach made the incredible assertion that climate change will have benefits, essentially as there will be a warmer winter. His comments beggar belief when we have the EPA and the HSE confirming a clear link between poor quality air in Dublin and rises in hospital admissions. How can we be sure this Government will protect citizens from climate impacts when the Taoiseach seems to think the climate emergency is a bed of roses? It beggars belief and I ask the Minister to reject the Taoiseach's insensitive and ridiculous statement now in this House. It seems the Taoiseach has not read the advice published by climate experts, such as the advice on the likelihood of devastating flooding in our coastal towns and cities, as reported in *The Irish Times* yesterday. Can the Minister clarify if the Cabinet has ever sat down with the Environmental Protection Agency, which regularly produces detailed reports on climate risks? I mention the dangers of climate change with the flooding of towns and the raising of the sea levels. It is extraordinary. I do not know what the Minister thinks or what happened the Taoiseach on the day or what he was taking but it was certainly quite-----

Senator Kevin Humphreys: A lot of it is down to bad planning as well.

Senator Terry Leyden: -----extraordinary. This brings me on to my next point on the announcement by the Environmental Protection Agency last week. The EPA noted that we will probably miss the EU 2020 climate commitment by more than 90%, a staggering margin which shows that the State is nowhere near to being on track to meeting Paris Agreement obligations. This will hurt citizens most, resulting in penalties running to the hundreds of millions. I am sure that the Minister will respond that these figures do not take into account commitments in the Government's climate plan. We have to remember that the EPA announcement is just the latest in a decade-long list of warnings that Ireland's emissions are hurtling in the wrong direction. Can we expect any sort of immediate response from the Government, when all previous EPA reports seem to have been consistently ignored? I appeal to the Minister to meet the EPA to discuss these issues with it, because it is vitally important. Will the Minister set out precisely how his Department is responding to information from the EPA? How does EPA expertise inform policy-making? Will the Minister provide information on how the national energy and climate plan required by the EU will be updated in light of the EPA's announcement?

Ireland has been left with a climate laggard status primarily since key Ministers and Depart-

ments have not been held to account. The Government has taken one necessary step with the organisation of a new climate delivery board. However, we have not seen any of the other measures to improve accountability and governance, despite commitments to the Joint Committee on Climate Action. Will the Minister set out specifically when we will see a Bill introduced with a net zero target and carbon budgets? When will Cabinet procedures be updated to ensure that Government memorandums align with climate obligations? When will budgetary rules be changed so that Votes of Departments take account of the cost to the Exchequer of purchasing emissions allowances? When will the repeatedly delayed national clean air strategy be published? Those are all issues which the Minister should look at and respond to. It would be useful if the Minister could refer to the specific month that these measures will be introduced and not merely the year. These actions may not sound exciting but without them the Government's climate plan is more like a climate promise than climate progress.

Regarding the severe impact of climate change, about which the Minister appears to be largely ignorant, I would also like to add that we cannot leave a generation of workers behind or expect those already struggling to shoulder the challenge. This is the responsibility of Government. A just transition needs to reach across every part of the country into every household, particularly the most vulnerable and those at risk of fuel poverty, which the Minister has mentioned in his speech. The Minister has finally taken the welcome step of partially responding to recommendations of the committee by appointing a just transition commissioner with €6 million now dedicated to a just transition fund to support the midlands and other relevant areas. This is certainly a step in the right direction. However, the Government is presiding over a decarbonisation programme in the midlands that is happening much quicker than any investment in the region despite years of warnings. There are still many outstanding questions which we are seeking answers to. Will the Minister inform the House when the appointment of the commission will take place? How will the independence of the chair be ensured and when will all relevant stakeholders be involved?

As my colleague, Deputy Cowen, stated, it is also important that people are aware that this new just transition fund was not created exclusively for Bord na Móna. It is for the communities and the local economies which will undoubtedly suffer from the closures. It is only right that the configuration of how the transition fund is rolled out is decided by people on the ground. Will the Minister provide information on decision-making in relation to the just transition fund and confirm that supports and funding will be made available to both workers and communities before further job losses occur?

Regarding budget 2020, it is also essential that additional funding for the warmer homes scheme and the fuel allowance reaches the most vulnerable in rural areas. It is especially disappointing that the Government has failed to undertake the necessary examination of fuel poverty across the country despite previous commitments. The Minister has previously stated that the expanded warmer homes scheme will be delivered to householders through an aggregated model and co-ordinated by a new task force chaired by his Department. How will this approach ensure that retrofitting of social housing is prioritised? A recommendation from Fianna Fáil in the Joint Committee on Climate Action was the establishment of a one-stop shop in each local authority to engage in outreach and to act as a repository for information for local communities. Fianna Fáil, on returning to government, will give climate action priority in the next Administration.

Senator Tim Lombard: I welcome the Minister and his contribution to this important debate. Climate change is one of the key issues that we deal with. We have heard the political

analyst from the Fianna Fáil press office make that statement here this morning. It is disappointing that Fianna Fáil is playing politics with such an important issue that we are trying to grapple with and on which we have made such progress in the last six months. We have to go back further than that. I compliment the Senators here who sat on the Joint Committee on Climate Action, as I did. Some of us spent months working on that framework. Some Members in this Chamber put their hearts and souls into that. I compliment those who turned up and participated. Others did not but that is an issue for them. When I was a member of that committee, I worked closely with all parties to bring forward a fair and comprehensive report which then became the blueprint the Minister announced. That has been a successful process. In the past six months, we have seen a major change in how Irish society views climate change. We have been trying to bring people with us and that has been a positive step.

The Minister has brought forward measures relating to just transition, retrofitting and other key issues such as transportation. I heard my colleague mention air pollution. We saw mistakes in the past related to air pollution. Fianna Fáil and the Green Party produced an air pollution policy with taxation implications for transportation, which had an awful effect on the air quality in Dublin in particular. We have learned from those mistakes, which is why this is so important, and are moving forward. I compliment the Minister on the roadshows he has brought forward and for the engagement at grassroots level, which we sought at the committee, to bring the people with us. In places such as Kinsale and Clonakilty, students came out and marched because it is their community, society and planet. They want change and I think that every Senator in this room is aware that unless we provide the change, we are letting our society down.

The train has left the station and there is major change, and we have to take people with us. Just transition is important. In my part of the world, we have both very urban and rural areas. How can one marry both of those with regard to the issue of climate change and take people along on this journey? That is the real challenge for the next ten years. How can we get rural residents and maybe older people in society to change their ways? I think the younger generation is moving rapidly but bringing the older generation with us will be a challenge. Transportation and a person's ability to access it, whether in rural Ireland or urban Ireland, is becoming a major part of that. I got a statistic from Bus Éireann last week about school bus services, that one school bus produces the same emissions as two dirty diesel cars. If there are 52 children on the bus, substantial savings are made with regard to emissions. That is the kind of thinking that we need to talk about to ensure that we work with the transportation links that we have to provide school transportation, especially in rural areas, so that there is a knock-on effect of reducing emissions.

Six months on from when the Minister announced his action plan, we have seen major positive change in society, which is what we need. We need to build on it and on that momentum. I am confident that the Minister has the necessary experience from the action plan for jobs and the ability and energy to deliver this important project, which is unique because it comes from central Government. If we do not have that drive and leadership, there will not be real change.

At meetings of the committee on which I sat, the key issue was that the Secretaries General had no ambition in so many areas. That is why there has to be a whole-of-government project. The level of ambition of the Secretaries General who turned up and gave evidence was absolutely frightening. It was everyone else's fault bar theirs. They were not going to come up with the solutions. The civil servant attitude must change if we are to have genuine governmental change in delivery on the ground. We have started on that process, but it must continue. The momentum must build. If we can continue to build it, we will get what society wants - a reduc-

tion in emissions and a move towards a carbon neutral society by 2050. These are important issues for society. Anyone who has been knocking on doors in the past two or three weeks will have encountered these issues at every third or fourth door. These are the issues people are talking about. That is why it is so important that we show leadership and deliver on this key issue. If we do not, we will let down society and the societies that will come after us. This is the ultimate challenge and we need to ensure we deliver on it.

Senator Máire Devine: I welcome the Minister, Deputy Bruton. I welcome the opportunity to address him directly on the climate action plan quarterly progress report. It is with dismay that all those who have worked so hard to influence the Government to take climate change seriously in the past year note what is happening. I am a bit downhearted to have to open my statement with an unapologetic condemnation of the Taoiseach's outrageous comments on the benefits of climate change. How can the Minister defend a plan that seeks to mitigate global warming when his leader implicitly posits it as beneficial? How can he stay here and expect us and the public to take seriously the commitments to tackle climate change? There is no possible justification for a trained scientist such as the Taoiseach in putting forward such damaging, ignorant commentary. Let us be clear: warmer winters bring heavier rain and flooding, not ambient indoor temperatures. Warmer winters mean people being evacuated from their homes because flood defences have been breached. Warmer winters do not mean sitting at home and turning down the heat dial. Warmer winters mean more landslides and deaths in road traffic accidents and by drowning. They mean more premature deaths and demands on public health services, not people sitting at home in their bikinis and counting their energy savings. Our winters have been getting warmer for decades, yet neither home energy costs nor carbon dioxide emissions have reduced. Is this not the reason the Government increased the carbon tax? Last year the Society of St. Vincent de Paul spent €3 million in heating the homes of those who have not yet felt the Taoiseach's so-called benefits of global warming. No doubt, the society will spend the same amount, if not more, this year. Perhaps the Minister might tell those concerned how they are doing global warming all wrong.

I could go on in that vein, but I want to address other issues that bring the climate action plan into grave question. An internal audit of the Minister's Department found that the State systems for monitoring whether Ireland was meeting key climate change targets were unsatisfactory. The audit found a significant number of failings in how progress in meeting climate targets was recorded and reported to the Government and senior departmental officials. While Ireland is set to fall short of EU climate targets next year and is also on course to miss significant targets for 2030, the internal audit found that the Minister was not informed on a systematic basis of performance gaps in Department policies to hit climate targets and that, as a result, he was unable to advise the Government on the need for corrective action. The audit found there were no procedural arrangements for reporting progress to senior civil servants and that their subsequent decisions might not have been informed by the most recent information. In addition, the audit found that there was a lack of formal reporting on overall climate change targets to the Government and the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Minister has no way of finding out what is going on, no evidence with which to advise the Government and has no way of reporting to this House. In essence, this renders the progress report null and void because the means by which evidence is harnessed is wholly compromised, yet it is the taxpayer who will be raided to pay exorbitant target failure fines and bear the burden of the Government's failures.

There are many other issues I could raise, including electric vehicles, retrofitting and the warmer homes scheme, but I want to concentrate on the pressing issue of the Shannon lique-

fied natural gas project and the Government's persistence in defending its retention on the list of projects of common interest, despite Ireland's unequivocal opposition to using fracked gas in its energy mix. The Climate Change Advisory Council has not given consideration to non-territorial emissions, although the issue is within its remit. At a committee meeting Professor John FitzGerald, whom the Minister quoted, described gas emissions as a distraction. On TV3 Deputy Naughton described discussions on fracked gas as a sideshow. There are grave concerns that the Government is seeking to row back on Ireland's anti-fracking commitments. As the Minister is proposing to commission a report on the security and sustainability of Ireland's energy supplies, it is imperative that he understand the report will be meaningless if it does not include an assessment of non-territorial emissions. As Professor Barry McMullin put it in his evidence to the climate action committee on 9 October:

We currently delegate responsibility for those emissions to the US. However, if it withdraws from the Paris Agreement [bearing in mind its continuous threats to do so and its frequent tantrums], all bets are off and we will have to look at our own responsibility much more closely.

We have co-responsibility in our climate change obligations to do no harm to others and no further harm to our planet in pursuit of our own mitigation targets. There is no circumstance whatsoever in which fracked gas can be a component of Ireland's future energy mix. I ask the Minister to prevail on the Taoiseach to stop trolling the citizens of the country and start taking the climate change obligations seriously. The Taoiseach has done a great disservice to the science and declaring evidence of climate chaos, while giving comfort to those who are unable to see the wood from the trees.

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins: I welcome the Minister. It is very clear that we need a radical, joined-up approach to climate action. As discussed in this House, we face multiple crises. We are facing an ecological crisis, given that 200 species become extinct each day across the world. There is a huge loss of habitat biodiversity. There is an interlinked crisis with climate change and its devastating impact. We also need a joined-up approach that reflects how our climate actions intersect with the sustainable development goals and development models that are sustainable socially, environmentally and economically.

I wish to focus on a couple of specific issues, beginning with scale. We are aware that Ireland is not simply a laggard. It is not about name-calling or a gold star badge of approbation or criticism we might express; it is literally about the work not being done. Ireland has fallen horribly behind. Given that we were meant to have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020, which is just a couple of months away, we are looking instead at a figure of 1%, or slightly more. By any book, it is an extraordinary level of failure. Let us be clear that while the protests on the streets may be accelerating, we have known about this issue. The science has been available for a very long time. Our performance has simply been inadequate and we face fines of hundreds of millions of euro. While the language is shifting and small actions are being taken, the required scale of action is not there. Surely, we should be vastly increasing the resources we allocate to mitigate the damage being done and deal with its impacts, rather than spending hundreds of millions of euro on fines for failing to meet our targets. A reserve fund of €650 million was earmarked in the budget for a potential no-deal Brexit, in addition to the hundreds of million already appropriately earmarked for a transition under Brexit, because it was recognised that a no-deal Brexit would be an emergency and a catastrophe requiring ur-

gent action. I note €500 million of the fund had been due to go into the rainy day fund but did not. If we do not face a no-deal Brexit, can we ensure that there is a similar scale of action on climate change and on the climate emergency which the Government has, at least, theoretically acknowledged?

The Minister spoke about the cost of carbon and carbon pricing. I supported an increase in carbon pricing because the price of carbon should reflect the cost of carbon. I do not believe that these measures are about incentivising good behaviour or discouraging bad behaviour. We are way past the point of gold stars or negative ticks. As the Minister will be very aware, the simple economic rationale for an increase in carbon pricing is that of economic externalities. Society has been bearing the costs associated with fossil fuels in terms of environmental, social and other damage. Those costs should instead be reflected in the price. That is the economic rationale used when carbon tax was originally being pushed forward. If that is the rationale, surely, every penny of carbon tax - not just the increase - should go to mitigation or adaptation to address the cost and damage of climate change. The Minister mentioned that every cent is ploughed back, but that is not the case. Only the €6 increase has been pushed back, a total of €90 million, which is a paltry sum given the scale of the crisis we face. I ask the Minister to commit to ensuring that all of those funds would be routed not to the general Exchequer, but to climate action and, perhaps, an intensification of the schemes set out in the budget.

We must also look to the budget. We must stop making small exceptions. A tax relief for diesel purchase for hauliers was introduced. On one side, a carbon tax was brought in, while on the other, a special tax relief for hauliers was introduced, in addition to possible tax reliefs on agricultural diesel. We need to be consistent. We need to join up what we do. Some weeks ago, Professor John FitzGerald acknowledged to the Joint Committee on Climate Action that the logic behind a carbon tax is that of economic externalities and that, as such, all of that funding should probably be designated to action.

I wish to focus on liquified natural gas, LNG, and the proposed LNG terminal. It is fundamentally at odds with our climate action plan and the decisions to ban fracking in Ireland and to divest from fossil fuels. We must be clear that fracked gas is a fossil fuel. The climate action committee considered the proposed terminal and heard very strong testimony from Professor Robert Howarth, who has been cited thousands of times, on the impact of methane, which emerges during the process of fracking and its transportation. A tonne of methane has 34 times the impact of a tonne of carbon. What is crucial is that the methane acts faster. We have been told that gas is a transition fuel that will somehow give us the space to do what is required but the fact is that fracked gas and the methane associated with its production are accelerants. As a result of the impacts of methane production, the terminal will not give us space to act but, rather, shorten the time we have to do. One third of all of methane being emitted into the atmosphere comes from fracking in the United States, a business which we would be supporting if we went ahead with the LNG terminal. It leads to higher temperatures, higher rates of climatic absorption and a shortening of the time to introduce the kinds of massive cultural shifts that are required.

There was reference to the idea that extraterritorial emissions do not count. We are on one planet and facing the same crisis. It is simply unacceptable that upstream costs would somehow be disappeared from a clean ledger that we manufacture. That is also important on a global level. For example, Japan and Europe have signed a trade agreement which contains climate targets, but in the meantime, Japan is funding coal-fired plants in Bangladesh. We cannot simply move the problem offshore and hope that it will not blow back and hit us. In a week when the

United States is making clear and definitive moves indicating it plans to pull out of the climate accord, we must not do anything to reward climate vandalism or irresponsible action in terms of fracking. The Minister and his colleagues, including the Taoiseach, were very eloquent about Mercosur and their concerns that actions not be taken in that regard which would encourage violation of our climate targets. We need to be consistent. I urge the Minister to reconsider this issue. There is a certain sense that we are waiting to see what happens and that this is a decision by a private industry. It is not. Let us be clear that its inclusion on the projects of common interest list means that it shall become an integral part of the relevant regional investment plans under article 12 and the relevant national ten-year network development plans under article 22. We are saying that we want to make this a priority if we go ahead with it. We are placing it at the centre of our national plan. It is certainly not a private enterprise that is happening separately. I urge the Minister to take any action he can on this issue.

On funding, I wish to highlight an example of the joined-up approach. Cycling is recognised as having multiple benefits in terms of air quality, health and congestion in cities, as well as in terms of climate. However, the funding for cycling in the budget was almost entirely allocated to greenways, which are a tourist product. There was no indication of how much of the €384 million additional funding for transport will go towards climate action. The emphasis on electric vehicles is a concern. It is positive to an extent but public transport will be key if we are to take action. I urge the Minister to take action on low-hanging fruit and put resources in place such that we see not an incremental plan of retrofitting over ten years, but full retrofitting over the next two or three years, along with a massive increase in public transport. These are issues which people support and to which there is no opposition. These are the easily-converted actions.

I will speak at length on peatlands and the Wildlife (Amendment) Bill tomorrow. Please, let us not take backwards steps. We cannot afford for bogs which may have been degraded in terms of habitat to become further degraded and a liability by drying out and contributing to our carbon emissions. In addition to the small-scale €5 million that is currently allocated, we need a massive acceleration in peatland rewetting and restoration.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: I join colleagues in welcoming the Minister, Deputy Bruton, to the House. He is bringing the same commitment and competence to this role as he did to transforming our unemployment figures. He brought about effective full employment over a couple of years in a similar planned way.

I am confident the same will happen in this case.

A few aspects are clear. As noted by my colleague, Senator Lombard, the science is no longer questioned. There is a general societal acceptance that something has to be done. Everything has been aided by some noticeable weather events in recent years that have given it a reality. There is a general acceptance and buy-in, which is a good place in which to be. There was also the recent climate action plan, to which the Minister, the committee and the Citizens' Assembly contributed. I will address some of the specifics because it will be helpful to the Minister to get a sense of what we think. There is no logic in going back over what is fully accepted in respect of science and ambition.

On electric vehicles, I take Senator Higgins's point that the ideal is to work primarily on public transport, although I have no doubt that will happen, as it should. The increase in the use of electric vehicles is part of the strategy and I am happy there is an additional allocation in the

budget for that. I refer, in particular, to charging points because they are a bone of contention. I have advocated on a few occasions in public places that there is a logic in seeking, perhaps in next year's budget or in the interim, the introduction of a special incentive for first-time drivers to buy an electric car. If they did so, it would give them ownership of the climate action agenda and a feeling that they are part of change. If they drove an electric car as their first car, it is highly probable they would continue to use one. I commend such a measure to the Minister because it is logical in a number of ways.

I am delighted that there is an allocation to upgrade 24,000 homes and businesses, which is progressive, as well as large groups of houses. I am happy with that proposal. There is great potential in covering a number of houses as a group, and in examining interesting payback models over time. Given the economies of scale and other factors, doing a swathe of houses or an estate is very logical in the case of social housing and, if it can be done, the private sector. There is certainly a strong case for continuing with the process of retrofitting.

Solar panels are interesting. My neighbour, who is a farmer as well as a private homeowner, recently installed them and anticipates that he will have paid for them in seven years. There will also be a saving in his fuel bill. It would be interesting to see the up-to-date figures on the use of solar panels, whose support is important. The Minister is committed to harnessing Ireland's ocean resources. It is believed that we have great potential in that regard and it would be interesting if he elaborated on it in his final remarks. While I may not hear them, I will read them later and would be interested to hear his response on the potential of wave power.

Energy poverty is a big issue, which is why it is important to retrofit and channel money into helping people for whom it will be difficult to get their house in order. With that in mind, it is good that €2 per week is added to the fuel allowance scheme. Contrary to some people, including our good friend Professor John FitzGerald, I believe that it is better that we started with a €6 per tonne increase in carbon tax. It is better to be incremental in order that people will come with us. Coming from a rural constituency, I know that greater increases would lead to a nightmare scenario, given the absence of public transport and because in many cases a car, often diesel fuelled, is the only mode of transport to work for people in low-paid jobs. It is unthinkable that such people would be put at a severe disadvantage. There needs to be a culture change, which will happen over time, in order that greater increases can become a realistic possibility.

Although it may not be as common in County Meath, where the Minister originally comes from, where I come from, as well as in the west and most of Ireland, there are non-arable pockets on every farm. They have no great viability for anything. I ask the Minister to collaborate with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, who has raised the issue previously, to consider how we could incentivise farmers to plant the 8 acres or 10 acres of non-arable land on most farms. When I was a child growing up in rural Ireland, there was always a curtain or canvas of trees around houses. People in those days planted trees around houses for shelter, heating and whatever and they were a regular feature. There should be more small-scale planting of trees. While there is reasonable societal objection to large plantations and there are issues in that regard, as the Minister will be aware, there is no issue with having small amounts on every farm. I commend that to the Minister because it needs to be considered.

Microgeneration is so important. I would like the Minister to consider co-operative micro-generation, such as a wind turbine in a community with buy-in from the community. It would have the advantage of providing energy for the community, perhaps with some surplus that could be sold for income. Everyone with a microgenerator could feed into the grid and be paid.

They are some of the practical issues, which are most helpful in this case. There is no point in restating our commitment to the project.

Senator Kevin Humphreys: The Minister is welcome and I do not question his personal commitment to the project. As he knows and as we now realise, climate change will affect our children's lives in the future. We have to look back and remember our mistakes. It is not that there were not warnings at the time when those mistakes were being made, such as when there was development on floodplains throughout the country. I recently listened to Senator Lombard's contribution and I welcome his late conversion to climate action. Senator Higgins and I, along with the former Senator, Grace O'Sullivan, fought line by line on the Heritage Act, which sought to allow the cutting down of hedgerows on a pilot scheme. Thankfully, the legislation was never commenced, which is a great recommendation to all the Senators who opposed it line by line. Nevertheless, that was only a few years ago. Nine months ago, we watched as all the Ministers lined up in this Chamber, gave their five-minute statement on climate change and left the room without listening to the debate, before repeating the process the following week in the Dáil Chamber. It showed to the public the lack of seriousness of the Government on the issue of climate change. The uproar, the arguments in both Houses and the campaign led by the young people of the country have made the Government realise that it is a real issue and that people care.

We have to learn lessons from the past. It is not so long ago that people welcomed the initiative in respect of dirty diesel that Fianna Fáil and the Green Party proposed. It was in line with the research at the time but due diligence was not done to ensure that it would not encourage the use of dirty diesel. As Senator Lombard noted clearly, it has had an impact in Dublin in particular but Cork, Limerick and Galway also experience the harmful effects of dirty diesel. We need to keep the public on board and to keep moving forward. One thing that really concerns me is whether due diligence is being practised with regard to what we are proposing. I will concentrate on electric cars because we are talking about spending €11 billion on them between now and 2030. One must question whether this is the right way to go. Electric vehicles will have a role to play in the future and with regard to how we tackle climate change but Senator Higgins was right. We must ask how we spend this money. Is it better spent on public transport? Do we get more bang for our euro by spending it in the right area? The Government is talking about having 840,000 electric vehicles on our roads by 2030. In principle, this is correct. We should encourage electric cars. However, if we are going to replace cars powered by petrol and diesel with 840,000 electric cars, it will not do anything about congestion. If we replace a conventional car with an electric car, we will still have congestion on our roads. Go out in this city on any evening during rush hour and one can see that we have far too many people commuting by private vehicles carrying one person so that will not resolve that problem. What has the Government said? It has said that it has set aside €200 million in Project Ireland 2040. The only problem is that the funding only runs to 2021. We are talking about 100,000 electric cars at a cost of €1.4 billion over the next five years. There are problems with this. We must look at what has been promised. We want 1,100 charging stations to be provided over the next five years by local authorities and the Minister has provided funding for that. If we get to the Minister's target, which is 180,000 electric cars operating within five years with 1,100 additional charging points bringing us up to 2,100 charging points with approximately 70 fast-charging stations, what will happen elsewhere? Many people talk about Scandinavian countries such as Norway being ahead of the curve on this, as indeed they are. There are 200,000 electric cars in Norway with 12,000 charging points yet there are queues. We are talking about 2,200 charging points for 180,000 electric cars in five years' time. Norway has 12,000 charging points for

200,000 electric cars, 2,800 of which are fast-charging points, yet it has queues. Where are we going with regard to the planning of this? There is one charging point for every 100 km of Irish road. There is one charging point for every 23 km of road in Norway yet there are queues. Do we really want to see Irish owners of electric cars having arguments over charging points or will we plan this properly and carry out due diligence? Will we work out how we get the best results for our euro?

We must be honest with people. The carbon tax receipts in 2018 were just over €400 million while fuel excise receipts for 2017 were nearly €2 billion. As the growth in electric vehicles will result in a loss of up to €1.5 billion in motor tax, VAT and fuel tax between now and 2030, how do we make up the difference? I would be delighted to see a drop-off in raising taxes because it would mean that we are starting to move towards a reduction in our carbon emissions but we must be honest with people about how this shortfall will be made up. The Minister mentioned the just transition. We must make sure that it is not the weakest people who are affected to make up for this drop in taxation. We need to be honest and to tell people exactly where this shortfall will be made up because we need to keep the public on board and to keep moving forward. We need real progress where people see real benefits in Ireland starting to take climate change seriously.

Senator Reilly has previously celebrated the new charging point that was installed on the grounds of the Houses of the Oireachtas. He said there were significant incentives, that the Government would give people thousands of euro to buy a new electric car and that there is no reason not to buy one. He said it was a win-win situation for everyone. How many people who are struggling on the average industrial wage can afford to buy a new electric car and get the €5,000 grant? If we want to benefit the many and not the few, would it not be much more prudent, and Fine Gael champions itself as the prudent party, to invest the money in public transport?

Recently, the Cabinet sanctioned 40 new rail carriages at a cost of €150 million. A figure of €35 million would produce an extra €250 in fuel allowance for vulnerable and older people, while €54 million would lead to a 10% reduction in public transport fees and would encourage more people to use public transport. A sum of €30 million could extend the city bikes schemes to five new towns, while for €600 million per year, we could have free public transport nationwide. Do we want 840,000 electric cars clogging up our roads and making us queue at charging stations or would we rather have free rail and bus travel to work for 20 years because these are the choices we need to make and they need to be that honest and rational about how we can encourage people to use public transport? People will say that this is fine and grand if someone lives in a city like Cork, Dublin or Limerick. What would I say about electric vehicles and grants for electric vehicles? They must be targeted. They cannot be done in an aggressive manner, in that people in rural Ireland will never have a bus stop at the end of their road so we need targeted grants for rural Ireland to ensure people can move around their communities. Should we give grants to everyone who has access to public transport to enable them to buy electric cars and create congestion in our cities and towns or should we put that money into public transport?

The Minister's party has come late to the party. Fine Gael has not always believed in tackling climate change and dealing with it in a serious manner. We must now do so in a collaborative manner. I will certainly pull my weight but I believe the way forward is serious investment in good public transport.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I also want to address the Minister today because climate action is needed. It is so important that we talk about change and awareness. I know the Minister spoke about electric cars, which are very important, and upgrading our houses in the report but plastic is a serious issue and it is urgent we work on that because we need some sort of action. What is the Minister's overall plan with regard to this?

I do not know if the Minister has heard of John Tyndall, a scientist born in Carlow in 1820. He was one of the first scientists to explore what was called the environmental phenomena, answering the question as to why the sky was blue. He was talking about the environment in the 1820s and how it affected us. It is nearly 2020 and there is an environmental emergency. He was ahead of his time.

We listen to Greta Thunberg and we see and hear how young people are affected by this. Young people walked out of their schools and protested because they know that climate action is so important. We should issue an official invitation to Greta Thunberg to address the Upper and Lower Houses, because she is also ahead of her time. She can guide us and certainly can help us with issues we need to address.

Young people are so firm on this and they know we need change but we are not making this change and this is the problem. I believe they feel we are not listening to them. They are our future and we need to make sure we work on the future. I would ask the Minister to look at this.

Previous speakers raised issues about cars and housing but I would like to ask about funding. Everything boils down to funding. Reports are done and funding for this and that is promised but are we going to deliver on this? I know the Minister is trying his best to make sure we deliver, but is he going to guarantee that what is in that report will be funded and that going forward we will listen to young people? We need to listen to them. That is the one thing that I would ask of the Minister today, that we make sure that we listen and that we work through the schools, because sometimes communication and awareness raising is a huge problem. Sometimes there is a bubble and once we go outside that bubble people feel they are not being listened to. We need to address young people and those in schools and all the areas in which we feel we can make the change. I believe the Minister will do that. I ask that he listen to my concerns and come back to me with some answers.

Acting Chairman (Senator Ned O'Sullivan): I will vacate the Chair for a couple of minutes to make a contribution. I thank Senator Humphreys for taking the Chair.

Acting Chairman (Senator Kevin Humphreys): Senator, I will be very strict on your time.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: I thank Senator Humphreys for obliging me. It has been a very interesting debate, and I am going to confine myself to one particular aspect of it, which will not surprise anybody here, and that is the Shannon LNG project. I have been in the House 12 years and I think my maiden speech here asked the Government of the day to support that project and to put everything it could behind it. Here we are 12 years on and unfortunately we are still very beleaguered.

I compliment the Minister and I read closely what he said in the Dáil. He was under fierce pressure from environmentalists, the Green Party and, extraordinarily, people on the extreme left. I would say to the Green Party that it had better mind its clothes, because if it does not, the Trotskyites and the people on the left will take them. A new party, a Trotskyite-green party,

has been formed.

Everybody now seems to know everything about liquified natural gas, LNG. When I talked about it six, eight, ten and 12 years ago, no one had a clue about it and no one had anything to say about it. The reason it did not get the go-ahead in those days was because one individual succeeded in delaying it, and he was entitled to go through the process. His fear at the time had nothing whatsoever to do with what we are talking about today, and perhaps Senator Higgins does not know this. The fear at the time was safety. Every kind of story was put out that this LNG would be explosive, volatile and dangerous but, in fact, empirical evidence showed that not to be true at all. Nevertheless, because of the process that was there at the time, the project was halted long enough for the principals behind it to get windy and nervous about their money and investment and to pull out.

Local people, local money and a local businessman persevered. They got new money and came up with a whole new project. I do not think any project in the history of this country has been subjected to such scrutiny and yet again, because they ran out of time, technically it was obliged to go back into the public domain, by which time Uncle Tom Cobley and others had got on the Shannon LNG bandwagon. It is the greatest bandwagon since the bandwagon against the Carnsore Point nuclear power station which was put forward many years ago by the great Des O'Malley.

I thank the Minister for holding his ground on projects of common interest. This project is essential in the long run to our energy security. The people who will be most affected by any downsides are the people of Kerry and Clare who are 99% in favour of it. We have Tarbert power station, which is oil-fired, Moneypoint, which is coal-fired, and Aughinish Alumina, and we welcomed them because we needed jobs. The world is about people. I cannot understand these people who care so much about humanity but who do not seem to be troubled about the problems of individual people.

I represent an area where there has been widespread immigration over decades. Towns and villages have been decimated. We cannot put a football team out, whereas before we would have had four teams competing with each other. I know the Minister is aware of this and, as he said, he will not approve of any project in Ballylongford, Tarbert or anywhere that does not stand up to scrutiny. He is right about that and we are prepared to accept all that, but it is essential that we have the option.

At the moment the focus is on fracked gas. We do not know what kind of gas will come in here eventually. There may be changes, improvements and new methodology, but it is important we have a terminal to receive clean gas if it comes into us in liquid form and is transmogrified back into gas, creating loads of jobs - 500 jobs in construction - and creating a new power station. No one seems to be looking at that. It is very frustrating for people.

I would love Members to listen to the people of north Kerry to hear how they view what is going on here. Now we have the Hulk and Cher against us. People are putting out a rumour now that the blooming Pope is against us. I say to the Minister to hang tough and to take on the Hulk, Cher and, if he has to, the Pope because this project is going to get over the line sooner or later and we will be damn glad of it.

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I thank Senators for what has been a very interesting and, in many ways, an encourag-

ing debate. I will try to deal with some of the points. Obviously, I cannot deal with all of them. Senator Leyden raised a few issues on which I am not sure he is 100% accurate. The climate Bill was a Fianna Fáil-Green Party one and it was not blocked. The situation is unfortunate in respect of the Bill - Senator Humphreys complained about it - with this transition statement. The Houses agreed the way it should be done last year and it was ludicrous, and I absolutely agree with the Senator in that regard. I hope we will agree to something better this year. That sort of came out of that Bill but that is not to criticise it. We just need to breathe life into these things.

There has been some criticism of us going to the Botanic Gardens. The Botanic Gardens have been an icon of respecting our environment and the biodiversity we have, and I think was absolutely appropriate, especially as it is located in the shadow of Glasnevin Cemetery where some of our great national heroes are buried. It is appropriate that we should go somewhere like that to say that we have a new challenge. That was the symbolism of picking the Botanic Gardens. We have a new challenge and we need to live up to it as our forebears took on big challenges in the past.

Senators are right in saying the 2018 figure shows us well off the European targets. I acknowledged that when I came into this position a year ago and said we had to produce a climate plan that would get us back on track, and I recognise that getting back on track means targeting the 30% reduction by 2030. One does not click one's fingers and get changes in retrofitting, transport infrastructure or renewable energy infrastructure overnight. One has to plan and deliver them. That is what we now have in place. The 2018 figure is off-target, but we have been putting a new plan in place that I think will get us back on target. I assure the Seanad that we are on track to have the new Bill which includes carbon budgeting before the committee before Christmas. That is the target I am working towards. My officials tell me that we will have the heads of the Bill before the committee. We can then have a meaningful debate about setting the targets. We will also implement climate-proofing, an issue raised by Senator Leyden. It will be part of Government procedure.

Senator Lombard, among others, rightly noted that the ambition of many in the leadership in Departments was lacking. However, the climate action plan has succeeded in lifting ambitions across government. Everyone has had to jump together. Everyone was reluctant to jump and be the one who would commit, but we have succeeded in getting every Department to jump together. It will mean tough standards for the agriculture industry. By and large, Teagasc's agenda has to be delivered by the agriculture industry without having an impact on other elements of the agricultural scene. Every Department has had to step up, particularly the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Senator Devine rightly referred to the criticism that featured in the 2018 auditor's report. I have rectified it. Climate monitoring is now in place. We are developing a dashboard to monitor not just greenhouse gas emissions in various sectors but also many indicators of impact. They will include the number of people switching to electric vehicles and the number of homes retrofitted, whether they are new or old homes. We are closely monitoring progress in achieving the targets we have set. For the first time, we will also have a carbon budget such that a failure by agriculture, transport or industry to meet its targets will become a drag on that sector's budget. There will be direct accountability within each sector. Not only will we be monitoring progress, there will be a knock-on effect on the sector concerned. We will see real accountability which the Senator is right to demand.

The issue that has generated the most heat is that of LNG. I must explain that LNG can be extracted through fracking or otherwise. This applies to the supplies imported from Scotland. Fracked gas can form part of any delivery. The Shannon LNG project has created such controversy because it is an American-sponsored project, which raises the issue of fracked gas. We need to look at the evidence cited. I am very conscious of this, which is why I announced that there would be a security and sustainability investigation. I will not support the provision of any funding for the project until I am satisfied on that front. The paper presented cites disputed evidence, with which not everyone agrees. The author advocates loading methane at a ratio of 86:1. The EPA requires a ratio of 25:1. As such, the paper argues that methane should be treated in a completely different way from the current consensus approach. It also argues that methane emissions from fracked and shale oil and gas are far higher than from natural gas, but that is debatable and the evidence must be examined. I raised this issue at a European level.

To be fair to Senator O'Sullivan, these projects have been on the list of projects of common interest because gas remains a transition fuel. Our ambition is to use five times as much renewable as non-renewable energy. Instead of 30% renewable energy we will use 70%. We need something to power the system when the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine. That source is gas. No other option is available to us. In time we may see the emergence of hydrogen, carbon capture and storage or other technologies that will allow this to change. There may be bigger batteries or more Turlough Hill-type projects, although the latter would be very expensive on the scale we would need. However, none of them is available to us. Gas is the transition fuel. Europe largely depends on imported gas, a lot of which comes from Russia; therefore, alternatives are desirable for reasons of security of supply. LNG terminals are one such alternative. That is why it has been on the list of projects of common interest in Europe for six years. The advantage of being included in that list is that the project could be eligible for state aid. We have made it very clear that we will not support the provision of such aid until we are satisfied about the robustness of the proposal.

We must also examine the role of gas in transition. Some Members, particularly in the Lower House, have been advocating stopping exploration for any fuel. When this question was tested scientifically by the climate advisory council, the advice ruled out oil exploration but advocated continued prospecting for gas because we need it in the transition. We have to make decisions based on the evidence, not just on the basis of an instinct that we do not want any more fossil fuel technology. We are in a challenging transition that will not happen overnight.

Many Senators have said we need bigger budgets. Of course, we need bigger budgets to support these changes. Carbon pricing represents a €6.5 billion commitment. It has been announced that we will raise €6.5 billion through carbon pricing and the money will exclusively be used for climate action measures. That is what climate pricing means. It was a significant budgetary commitment. I remind the House, as Senator Murnane O'Connor raised the issue, that there is more than one way to skin this cat. We cannot look to the Government and the taxpayer to fund all of it. Regulation will be important. We are already introducing a requirement by which anyone adding an extension to a house of more than 25% of the floor area will have to bring the building energy rating up to B2. That will not mean shelling out heaps of money. If someone has enough money to expand his or her home and do all of that work, he or she can also be expected to future-proof it.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: It creates a cost for the person doing the building work.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The same is true in other areas. There is no doubt that regulation will be introduced for the use of nitrates and the management of different parts of the environment. I have no doubt that in time BusConnects will be pushed through, not by some big subsidy but because we are giving priority to buses and accepting that no matter how many cars there are, the space in which to drive them is limited.

Senator Kevin Humphreys: The Minister might have trouble in selling that to some of his colleagues.

Deputy Richard Bruton: These are controversial measures, but if we want to be serious about tackling this issue, we will have to make these decisions. It is not about assuming the taxpayer's pockets are ever deeper. Some of it is about intelligent policymaking and putting a price on things. Congestion pricing has been introduced successfully. However, these are not popular measures. That is why Senator Lombard is right when he talks about the importance of engagement. We have to get people to understand the ground has shifted on some of the things we tend to think we have a right to do. We have to rethink some things.

Plastics are a very important gateway to changing behaviour. They will probably not have a huge impact on our carbon output in and of themselves. Their merit is that they are light; therefore, the aggregate weight is not that much. However, they are a really important symbol to show people that they have to change the way they behave. We cannot dispose of plastic on a single-use basis when it takes six tonnes of carbon to produce one tonne of plastic. We have to rethink our use of these materials. It is a really important signal of the direction in which we will be going. We have made decisions to start consultation on significant changes in our use of plastic.

The issue of microgeneration and solar energy was raised by Senator Joe O'Reilly. They definitely have a future. We are committed to developing a microgeneration policy. We only support solar energy projects for domestic and farm use. In time we will offer a payback price to those selling solar power supplies to the grid. However, the order of priority in any of these areas is to improve building and insulation first and then to look at the energy system. Solar energy is used to modify and reduce one's dependence on the grid and then the surplus is sold to the grid. This is not about doing nothing about those first two steps and just hoping to sell power to the grid. That would be a very expensive way of generating power. Microgeneration is about helping to make people self-sufficient and become more energy conscious and careful about their community. The co-operative idea is good one. I do not want the idea to get out there, which some farmers would like to see, that this is a new enterprise where one can simply sell solar power from one's shed, which would be a new business. Solar energy must reduce one's dependence on energy and it then becomes a virtuous circle.

I wish to reassure Senator Humphreys about electric vehicles. Norway has 300,000 electric vehicles and 100,000 plug-in hybrids and that is the background to the 12,000 charging points in that country. The direction of travel here is that we will phase out grants for electric vehicles over time. Within three or four years, it will be a no-brainer to go for an electric vehicle rather than a diesel vehicle. It will be cheaper to run and, leaving taxes aside, it will be more efficient because the batteries will be able to provide for longer distances, will be more efficient and will be cheaper to buy. Diesel will become increasingly a thing of the past. That is why we have said there will be a ramp-up of electric vehicles. At the moment, 4% of new vehicles are electric and that will ramp up. If, by 2025, we have 180,000 electric vehicles on the road, that is still roughly 20% of purchases. It is only towards the end of the decade that we will see that

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20% increase to 100% of the new cars going on the road being electric. By that time, a home charger will provide enough range for drivers and we will not have such a requirement for public chargers but we need to put in the public charger infrastructure to get the system off the ground. That is why we are doing what we are doing.

We will also require - by regulation as opposed to grant, to take up Senator Murnane O'Connor's point - anyone with 20 car parking spaces to provide a charger from 2025. It will not all be the taxpayer being asked to pay for this infrastructure. We must recognise that trying to persuade people to do the right thing will be a part of it.

There were many other points made and it would be unfair to try and summarise them or deal with them in turn. I thank Senators for their support. There will be cynicism and people will rightly say that this is a case of, "Make me virtuous, Lord, but not yet." There has been a serious shift of opinion in the Houses and among the electorate, driven largely by young people, to whom we must listen. There are plenty of young Irish people who can articulate the case just as well as any other person. I have spoken to many of them and they open one's eyes in how aware and conscious they are. I intend to have more systematic youth engagement as part of the engagement process that we are talking about.

Acting Chairman (Senator Ned O'Sullivan): I thank the Minister. That concludes the debate. When it is proposed to sit again?

Senator Tim Lombard: We propose to sit again tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10.30 a.m.

The Seanad adjourned at 6.45 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 6 November 2019.