



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

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

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SEANAD ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 11 Samhain 2020

Wednesday, 11 November 2020

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

*Machnamh agus Paidir.
Reflection and Prayer.*

Gnó an tSeanaid - Business of Seanad

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

The need for the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications to make a statement on the roll out of the national smart metering programme.

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

The need for the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage to allocate urban regeneration funding for the Bridge Street and Linenhall Street areas in Dundalk, County Louth.

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

The need for the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage to make a statement on the recent number of homeless deaths.

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

The need for the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to make a statement on the impact of Covid-19 lockdowns on the social life and mental health of secondary school students.

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

The need for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to make a statement on the current practice of industrial sprat fishing in Galway Bay and other coastal areas.

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

The need for the Minister for Health to put a plan in place for consultation between the Department of Health and NPHE to ensure the safe reopening of retail establishments in December 2020.

I have also received notice from Senator Seery Kearney of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Climate Action, Communications Networks and Transport to make a statement on the terms of reference for the feasibility study into the MetroLink to Knocklyon, Dublin 16.

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

The need for the Minister for Health to make a statement on the continuing Covid-19 restrictions on religious worship in Ireland and the constitutionality of these restrictions.

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

The need for the Department of Finance to clarify whether travel agents qualify for the Covid restrictions support scheme.

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

The need for the Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion to outline her plans to carry out a review of visiting teachers services for visually impaired students at second level.

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

The need for the Minister for Health to make a statement on and to provide a timeline for when community social day care facilities for older persons are expected to reopen; and when respite care facilities will open their doors for older persons and their families.

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

The need for the Minister for Education to consider purchasing the land adjacent to St. Patrick's National School in Diswellstown, Dublin 15 to facilitate the expansion of the school.

I have also received notice from Senator Róisín Garvey of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Education to make a statement on the provision of autism spectrum disorder, ASD, places in second level schools in County Clare.

The matters raised by the Senators are suitable for discussion. I have selected Senators Ahearn, McGahon, Moynihan, Keogan and O'Reilly and they will be taken now. Senator Gallagher has withdrawn his Commencement matter, which I had originally selected. The other Senators may give notice on another day of the matters that they wish to raise.

Nithe i dtosach suíonna - Commencement Matters

National Smart Metering Programme

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister of State at the Department of Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Senator Garret Ahearn: I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House.

Since 2019 and throughout 2020, ESB Networks has rolled out new electricity smart metering technology in homes across Ireland. If and when this roll-out is completed, domestic and business premises in Ireland will have a smart meter installed. Customers have been told that there is no additional charge for smart meters but that is not the case. The Commission for Regulation of Utilities, CRU, has already announced that household bills will increase by between €30 and €70 from 1 October 2020, partially to pay for this. Many countries, like Germany, chose not to deploy a mass roll-out of smart meters because of costs. There are many cautionary tales where the roll-out costs have escalated very significantly from initial estimates like in the UK. All of this for a programme with no clear consumer or environmental benefits. Many countries have deployed smart meters ahead of Ireland and there is no case showing material positive improvements in energy use or other consumer benefits.

We know that under EU regulations Ireland is obliged to roll out smart meters as long as a positive business case for it can be made. The CRU commissioned a cost-benefit analysis, published in 2017, that found the project would cost €1.2 billion and have a €36 million negative net present value, which it deemed broadly neutral. The national smart meter programme, NSMP, has undergone little public scrutiny in contrast with other Government spending. I believe that if the savings that have been promised with this programme are clear and tangible then there should be no issue with having a full scrutiny of the costs, particularly at a time when the economic consequences of the pandemic are becoming clear, and the impact of Brexit looms for both Irish businesses and citizens.

The biggest assumed benefit underpinning the cost-benefit analysis is an assumption that customers will shift their consumption from peak times through the imposition of a time-of-use tariff. The ESRI's behavioural research unit conducted a study, in collaboration with the CRU, that found customers are reluctant to use the new time-of-use tariff. Does this now render the cost-benefit analysis assumption false?

Despite this evidence, the CRU continues to mandate that all electricity suppliers provide customers with at least one time-of-use tariff and must take "reasonable and effective steps to migrate all relevant residential and smaller business customers to an appropriate time-of-use tariff in a timely manner" ultimately removing customer choice in terms of flat-rate tariffs. As the spokesperson for enterprise and trade in this House, I am very concerned at this. Why are we insisting that small businesses must pay more for peak electricity usage during this pandemic?

I have a number of questions that I hope the Minister of State might be able to answer. What exact benefits are customers and businesses paying for? Why has an updated CRU cost-benefit analysis not been published? How can paying for smart meters that will push businesses to a higher tariff be justified during a crippling economic time? Why have so many other countries

opted out of a smart meter roll-out while Ireland has not, despite limited evidence of the benefit and the likelihood of escalated costs? Why are there no smart meter success stories internationally?

Is the Minister of State happy that the CRU has this month implemented an 11.6% increase in the regulated distribution charge payable by electricity customers, partially to pay for the smart meter programme at a time when there is no inflation and the country is reeling from the economic effects of Covid-19? Is she aware that the recent Electric Ireland price rise of €35 per home is an almost exact pass through of these increased regulated costs? Can she confirm that consumers are paying the price for smart meters? What is the position for businesses that are currently closed or partially open? They are not going to want, under any circumstances, to be charged for a smart meter that is of no use to their businesses at this time.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Senator Pippa Hackett): I thank the Senator for raising this issue and providing the opportunity to update the House on this important project. I extend apologies from the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications, Deputy Eamon Ryan, who cannot be here in person as he is in the other Chamber.

The programme for Government commits to ensuring that the energy efficiency potential of smart meters starts to be deployed in 2021 and that all mechanical electrical meters are replaced by 2024. The smart meter upgrade is a meter replacement programme to modern smart-ready technology. New general electricity meters are being rolled out across Europe and internationally. When the programme completes in Ireland in 2024, all domestic and business premises will have a new, modern meter installed. The programme is being co-ordinated by the CRU, with ESB Networks, for the rolling out of the smart-ready electricity meters nationwide.

Since September 2019, when ESB Networks commenced the replacement of over 2 million electricity meters, over 180,000 meters have been installed to the end of October 2020. Owing to Covid restrictions progress in 2020 has been challenging. However, ESB Networks is to be congratulated for managing to safely comply with all national public health guidelines while managing to maintain a productive deployment programme.

Meter installation continues under the current level 5 restrictions, including indoor installations. ESB Networks has implemented additional Covid-related safety precautions such as additional personal protective equipment, PPE, full sanitisation at the meter location and minimal contact with customers. I can also confirm that all indoor exchanges are only taking place by appointment with the customer. We expect 500,000 meters to be installed in each of the next four years to reach our 2024 target.

The installation of smart meters is a key enabler for the energy transition to a decarbonised system, as outlined in the climate action plan. In addition, the move to upgrade to digital meters will bring many benefits for energy customers by enhancing competition, making bills more accurate, providing customers with better information on their consumption and empowering them with new tools to make more informed choices about their energy needs. The better information provided by smart meters will enable customers to reduce consumption and utilise higher amounts of electricity, increasingly from renewable sources, at off-peak times. Smart meters will also facilitate the development of microgeneration smart grids, and the increasing electrification of transport and heating. Smart meters are configured to record consumption in day, night and peak time periods, as well as in shorter half-hour intervals. Smart meters are

also configured to record any electricity feeding into the grid. Customers with a smart meter will be able to avail of new tariffs and services, which will be available from electricity supply companies from 2021. These tariffs and services will include the ability for energy companies to offer microgeneration tariffs so customers can get paid for producing electricity that is fed into the grid. The climate action plan commits to having a microgeneration framework in place by June 2021.

On an EU level, the new green deal calls for much more citizen engagement with the clean energy transition to empower them to take action. Smart meters will enable customers to become much more involved and aware of their own energy usage and potential production. This citizen knowledge is a key enabler to help meet our own ambitious targets to 2023 and beyond. ESB Networks has begun the installation of smart meters in parts of Dublin, Cork, Laois, Kildare, Meath and Wicklow. This roll-out will continue on a phased area-by-area basis and a detailed roll-out plan is currently being developed.

Officials in the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications participate in a smart meter steering group that is chaired by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, which also has representatives from ESB Networks, retail energy suppliers and other stakeholders. The steering group is working on all aspects of the smart meter roll-out and aims to ensure that communication between all of the relevant parties is effective and that targets set out for the roll-out will be delivered.

Senator Garret Ahearn: I thank the Minister of State for her reply. I note that she said that during 2020 it is quite difficult to have the same pace of roll-out as 2019, so I hope the situation will be better next year. However, if the roll-out has slowed down, it is the perfect time to reassess and re-evaluate whether it is the right approach from both the cost and environmental perspectives. I have been speaking to businesses in Tipperary and around the country that have concerns, especially about costs. Every decision the Government makes and certainly every decision that is made in the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation is related to reducing costs for customers during this time. There is a certain level of concern, and it is factual, that introducing this is going to increase costs.

I set out a number of questions earlier and I would appreciate if the Minister of State would get the Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, to refer back to me in detail on them. It is a very important issue for households and especially for businesses that are struggling.

Senator Pippa Hackett: I acknowledge that the cost-benefit of this is crucial. If we want to incentivise people to be more cognisant of the electricity they are using and their energy consumption, it has to be simple for them to do that. The Senator asked a number of questions and I have noted them. I am sure somebody can look over the Official Report as well. I will bring them to the Minister, Deputy Ryan, and ask him to refer back to the Senator in a timely manner.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: At the outset, I wish to express my sympathy and the sympathy of the House to you, Senator McGahon, on your family bereavement in recent days.

Senator John McGahon: Thank you for your condolences, a Leas-Chathaoirleach. My cousin Niall McGahon famously won an FAI Cup medal in 1958 with Dundalk FC at the age

of 18 years, so I appreciate that.

I submitted this Commencement matter today on urban regeneration funding because it is such an important issue for the north end of Dundalk town. The Bridge Street and Linenhall Street area has essentially been a neglected part of Dundalk for the past 40 years for various reasons. I live only a few minutes away from this part of the town and it has one of the most sincere and genuine communities that Dundalk town has to offer. The residents and traders in that area back and support each other continuously, but I am here today to state that they need extra support in the form of substantial Government funding under urban regeneration for the Bridge Street and Linenhall Street area.

During the past year Louth County Council has embarked on an extremely ambitious project, worth in excess of €5 million, which has totally transformed the Clanbrassil Street area, the main street in Dundalk. If the Minister of State can imagine Dundalk at present, we have transformed The Square and it extends up Clanbrassil Street. It is worth €5 million. It goes up into Church Street and stops dead on Clanbrassil Street. Stepping between the two streets is like stepping into a different town.

That has not stopped local residents and businesses doing their best to make the area thrive as a bustling community. We have people like Martin McElligott who is in charge of the business improvement district scheme, Dundalk BIDS. They have embarked on a really ambitious programme, including an art mural programme, that constantly strives to help businesses in the area to improve. We have people like Joan Martin, our chief executive in Louth County Council, Frank Pentony and Catherine Duff, director of services, who, along with staff members, have put months of work into this application to make it an attractive one for the Department to consider. I consider it so good that I would find it hard to believe it would not be approved. Indeed, they have submitted further information that was requested this year to strengthen the basis of the application.

This funding will have to be in the millions, make no doubt about it, and it will have to be done over two projects. If we can get the funding approved by the Department, it will really transform this part of Dundalk town. It can become a thriving hub for business, residents and the wider community. It can also be a flagship project for the Minister and the urban regeneration fund and can be shown to other towns as an example of how to apply for funding and how it is done. I believe Dundalk can be a leading example for other towns to follow.

Approving the application for this project will provide previously unimagined potential for the north end of Dundalk. If it can be imagined, there could be residential units above shops, enticing younger people to come there and live above the shop again, pedestrian space unlocked, a thriving community space created in the heart of Dundalk, the streetscape improved to make it more accessible for elderly people and people with disabilities, and vacant and derelict buildings having disappeared and been replaced with brand new retail units in which young entrepreneurs can get their first chance or start. It will redefine the north end of Dundalk town.

I cannot emphasise enough how important this funding is for Dundalk. It is an area that is crying out for support. It has had massive local support and received great support from the county council, but we need Government intervention in the form of substantial funding that will allow us to revolutionise the street space for residents and business alike. I believe we have one chance to make that happen, and that chance is with this funding. I am here in our national Parliament to emphasise how important it is for the town of Dundalk.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): I thank Senator McGahon for raising this important matter.

Project Ireland 2040, which was launched by the Government on 16 February 2018, is the overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development of Ireland. It includes a detailed capital investment plan for the period 2018 to 2027, the National Development Plan, NDP, 2018-2027 and the 20-year national planning framework, NPF. The principles of the NPF are underpinned by the national development plan, a ten-year, €116 billion capital investment programme. The National Development Plan 2018-2027 established four new funds, with a combined allocation of €4 billion to 2027. The urban regeneration and development fund, URDF, has an allocation of €2 billion to 2027, primarily to support the NPF's growth enablers for the five cities and other large urban centres.

The URDF, which was launched in 2018, is providing part-funding for local authority-led projects that will enable a greater proportion of residential and mixed-use development to be delivered within the existing built-up footprints of our cities and large towns, while also ensuring that more parts of our urban areas can become attractive and vibrant places in which people can choose to live and work, as well as to invest and visit. The URDF programme has been very well received and already it is providing assistance for a pipeline of major projects that will contribute to the regeneration and rejuvenation of our five cities and other large towns, in line with the objectives of the national planning framework and national development plan.

In mid-2019 approval in principle and provisional funding allocations issued in respect of 87 major projects throughout the country. This significant pipeline of projects, approved under call 1 of the URDF, is set to have a transformational impact in urban areas throughout the country. Under call 2 of the URDF, which was launched earlier this year, Louth County Council submitted an application seeking support for the project the Senator mentioned.

11 o'clock

A large number of proposals were received under call 2, with every local authority submitting at least one application. The nature of the URDF programme means that the proposals are very complex, and each requires detailed assessment. The assessment process for applications received under call 2 is in train at present, and it is intended that a new tranche of approved projects will be announced later in the year, which will augment the existing pipeline of projects from call 1 and contribute to the achievement of programme for Government commitments and the objectives of the national planning framework.

I listened to the case made by the Senator regarding the Bridge Street and Linenhall areas of Dundalk. He made his points very well. I met Senator McGahon previously regarding this project and he outlined its merits. It is a key project for Dundalk and I assure the Senator that his representations have been well made and they will be listened to in my Department. It is important that we unlock the potential of our large towns and cities, and that is exactly what URDF funding is for. It is the cornerstone to enable our citizens and our investors to realise their potential and to ensure we have a strong, mixed use regenerated area in our towns and cities. I look forward to working with the Senator during my term to deliver projects such as this one, which is important for the area and Dundalk itself.

Senator John McGahon: I thank the Minister of State for all his support for this application in recent weeks. While Dundalk is the largest town in Ireland, the Minister of State's home town of Mullingar has similar issues. He knows the issues at stake here, therefore. He is right to state that this is transformative funding. It has the potential to unlock previously unimagined ideas. Much urban regeneration funding has come into Dundalk in the past two years. The

Bridge Street area is the final piece in the jigsaw. The application and substantial funding I seek today, which must be millions of euro, is the first part of the jigsaw that will benefit the rest of the Bridge Street area. If this application for funding is successful, we will sit back down with Louth County Council to consider which application we will submit next to progress regeneration even more. We will be bringing that issue back to the attention of the Minister of State. I cannot stress enough how vital this funding is for Dundalk. It really needs to be approved, and we must do everything we can to get this funding application across the line.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I thank Senator McGahon for his very elegant timing. I call the Minister of State.

Deputy Peter Burke: I again thank Senator McGahon for raising this issue. I will take on board all the merits he has put forward regarding this project, and he has discussed them at length with me in the past as well. It is important that projects such as this are supported. They are the core regeneration projects that will unlock the potential of our towns and that is the key aspect of what the URDF seeks to do under the national planning framework. I hear the case the Senator has made; it is a strong case for Dundalk and I will bring that message back to my Department. It is important that we advocate for genuine projects, such as this one, which are able to stand on their own merits. I believe that is what this project does.

Homelessness Strategy

Senator Rebecca Moynihan: I submitted this matter for debate because the week before last five homeless people died. We already had a spike in the number of homeless people during the summer. That could have been due to Covid-19, or people may not have been comfortable within homeless services because of a lack of social distancing and therefore opted to live in tents. There was a tragic death in my area of a homeless man who was attacked for his mobile phone. He was living in a tent down a lane in a residential area.

As we head into the winter months, it is important we put a strategy in place to deal with this situation. This is our first experience of the pandemic in deep winter. People in the homeless services area already have many challenges because of the cold weather. We do not have figures for the rest of the country, and Councillor Anthony Flynn, who does a great deal of work with the Inner City Helping Homeless charity, has called for those to be provided. There has been a spike in Dublin and we think the number of deaths is more than that, and that is backed up by figures from the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, DRHE. We do not know the exact figure for the rest of the country, however. Councillor Flynn is hearing reports from some of his colleagues regarding the situation in Galway, Cork and Limerick.

It is important that we prioritise this issue, especially during a winter in the middle of a pandemic. I also emphasise the need for more funding for the Housing First approach and wrap-around services. We have an issue with homelessness and the lack of housing supply, but there is also an issue regarding addiction and the associated wraparound services required for the more vulnerable in our homeless population. Before we get into the very dark winter months, it is important the Minister of State gives this House details of the strategy for preventing deaths of homeless people on the streets. I would also like him to elaborate on the Housing First strategy and if there is going to be a prioritisation of wraparound and addiction services for people who are homeless and who are our most vulnerable population in that situation.

Deputy Peter Burke: My Department has been made aware of the recent deaths of several individuals who had been rough sleeping or accessing homelessness services. Each of those deaths is a tragedy for those involved and their loved ones to whom I extend my sympathies. Out of consideration for the families of the deceased, we should respect their privacy and not be drawn into speculation regarding the individual circumstances of the deceased or the causes of those deaths. I know that all the Members will be mindful of such sensitivities.

The Senator has, however, raised important issues. It is vital that we continue to deliver the appropriate measures to ensure all individuals experiencing homelessness are supported to exit homelessness into a permanent housing solution and that those with complex health and mental health needs are supported. While all homeless people have a need for stable housing, homelessness is a complex issue and a variety of other supports and interventions can be required to meet individual needs. Indeed, many homeless people, particularly those engaged in rough sleeping, have complex health and social care needs, including in connection with addiction and mental health issues which require care and supports beyond the simple provision of accommodation through the housing authorities.

Consequently, a multi-agency approach is considered necessary to successfully address homelessness. Addressing homelessness is a key priority for the Government and for the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Deputy Darragh O'Brien. The Government and my Department are committed to supporting all households experiencing homelessness to obtain a home utilising the various social housing supports available. The number of people accessing homeless services has been reducing in the last year. There were 1,741 fewer individuals in emergency accommodation in September this year compared with September 2019. I take this opportunity to place on the record my gratitude to the staff of all our local authorities and service delivery partners in the NGO sector, whose tireless efforts in what has been a difficult operational year have allowed this to happen. Of particular note is the 35% reduction in families in homelessness in that time.

While we welcome these reductions, we of course recognise the size of the task that we still face ahead of us. The programme for Government commits to the increased supply of public, social and affordable homes. The Government will increase social housing stock by more than 50,000 units, with the emphasis on new builds. The Minister, Deputy O'Brien, has established a high-level task force to address homelessness and to have an input into the implementation of the commitments in the programme for Government. Budget 2021 also makes provision for €218 million in funding for homelessness services next year, which is an increase of €22 million on the provision for 2020. The increased funding will allow for a greater focus on preventing homelessness, in the first instance, while also ensuring that pathways out of homelessness for those individuals and families in emergency accommodation are secured as quickly as possible.

I am particularly mindful of the challenges faced by rough sleepers during the winter. Cold weather arrangements are in place nationally for the winter period. My Department is working closely with local authorities in putting in place the necessary measures, including additional accommodation and increased outreach. The DRHE, which has responsibility for more than 70% of all homeless people nationally, activated its cold weather initiative on Thursday, 29 October. That includes an increase in overall bed capacity, a 24-hour service and facilities with meals included, enhanced rough sleeper outreach and increased contingency placements for families.

Allied with this, the HSE winter plan also includes measures to support individuals expe-

riencing homelessness. This includes service provision enhancements, such as expanded GP supports to homeless households and the extension of Covid-19 measures. Safeguarding the health of people accessing homeless services during the Covid-19 pandemic is of paramount importance. My Department is working closely with local authorities and the HSE to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 in homeless services. Additional accommodation is in place to allow for necessary social distancing and capacity for self-isolation of suspected confirmed cases of infection. I want to assure Senator Moynihan and others in the House that work is continuing to be done to address homelessness.

Senator Rebecca Moynihan: I thank the Minister of State. It is good to hear that he intends to establish a task force and that additional resources will go into homeless services.

Like the Minister of State, I want to express my gratitude to all of the people who have worked in homeless services from March onwards. It was quite a remarkable feat in terms of the outbreak within homeless services. Everybody pulled together. It is important we ensure that no more homeless families enter homelessness. While it is good to see the figure stabilising this year, that is in large part due to the eviction ban. We know that most people coming into homeless services come from the private rented sector. In the new year we should consider extending the eviction ban beyond the restrictions in level 5. I thank the Minister of State for his response and look forward to working with him over the winter to ensure there is no repeat of the very tragic number of deaths over the past couple of weeks.

Deputy Peter Burke: I thank Senator Moynihan for raising this very important issue and her constructive comments. Homelessness is a major challenge and as a Government we have to work with might and main to secure the commitments contained within the programme for Government and ensure we respond to this issue with all of the armoury of the State.

Youth Services

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire, an Teachta O’Gorman.

Senator Sharon Keogan: I thank the Minister for coming to the House to answer this question. I raised it with him at the Joint Committee on Children, Disability, Equality and Integration last week. It is very important that we acknowledge the sacrifices the youth have made at this time. The Minister has allocated moneys for youth services, but that does not deal with the many young people who have suffered as a result of the Covid restrictions on their lives. It stands in contrast to other areas that the Government has allocated moneys to. Students were allocated €250. Working people got stay and spend vouchers worth €250. A small token for the youth would allow them to invest in going to the gym, taking up music or the arts or learning a new skill. I am a little disappointed that the Government has left the youth out of supports at this time. I would like the Minister to give me some confidence that he will do something for them.

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I thank the Senator for raising this matter. We have not left young people out in our response to Covid. Young people have been central in the response not just of the Government but also of my Department. We are aware that Covid has disrupted all elements of life across the country and has had a particular impact on the well-being of young people. Their educational progress has been interrupted and, as the Senator said, their wider social and com-

munity life has been affected. Those who are early in their careers have had their lives disrupted over the past number of months.

In order to have a full understanding of this matter, my Department has commissioned research on the impact of Covid-19 on young people. That research aligns with research done internationally showing that lockdown has had an impact on people's mental health and well-being. That impact has been particularly acute in marginalised groups. It is also worth noting that while there has been an impact on young people, they have rallied in response to Covid. This was recognised by the acting CMO recently, and it is important to put that on the record.

Youth organisations around the country have been leading the community response to Covid and I want to express my thanks to them. We should never underestimate the potential for young people in Ireland to show leadership at a time of crisis.

My Department funds a range of organisations in the youth sector, and we have continued funding them. Even during the lockdown, the vast majority of youth organisations continued to stay open and support the young people who are part of their cohort. That has been particularly important in maintaining the mental well-being of young people. That issue arose in the research we undertook. The young people who engaged with youth services during the lockdown had better outcomes than those who did not. I want to recognise those involved in the youth sector and the national organisations which support them.

We supported the youth sector through a number of small grants that were spread across the country, comprising capital and current grants, to help organisations to meet the costs of Covid. More recently, we also provided a grant scheme to allow them to upgrade their ICT, which is particularly important because many other organisations have had to move online in order to facilitate their ongoing engagement with young people.

In 2020, we spent €61.79 million on current funding and €3 million on capital funding. Following my engagement with the youth sector, in particular recognising the great work it did, we added an additional €5 million in current spending in the budget for next year. That is a significant increase in the budget and was more than the sector had lobbied for. I wanted to recognise the significant work the sector does and the tens of thousands of young people across the country it supports.

Broad supports across the sector are the best way for the State to invest money. The Senator has put forward the idea of the voucher scheme. It is difficult to see how that will bring about broad supports, in particular given that many of the sectors she mentioned, such as gyms, the arts and leisure centres, are closed at level 5. At a time when young people most need supports, I do not feel such a scheme would deliver for them. In contrast, youth services are open at level 5. That is why it is the view of my Department that we should provide supports to wider youth services. We look forward to continuing to do so. I thank the Senator for raising this issue and I am happy to hear her comments on what I have said.

Senator Sharon Keogan: I thank the Minister. I am not aware of any youth services that are open at level 5, certainly not in my area. I think the voucher scheme is a really good idea. I honestly believe it is achievable. If the stay and spend initiative is achievable, so too is investment in youth services or recreational vouchers that can be used with certain providers. I am a little bit disappointed to hear that the Minister may not have considered this as being a good investment.

It is really important to invest in our youth, encourage them to get involved in things, keep their minds active and keep their mental health and well-being at their best. If we let that slip, a number of years will be lost in terms of their development in life. A voucher scheme would have been a good idea.

The Department of Transport ran a good scheme for a number of years, the “kids go free” scheme. This year, unfortunately, it did not happen because of Covid. I mentioned this to the Minister for Transport, Deputy Eamon Ryan, who indicated that he might consider it for the month of December. The Minister, Deputy O’Gorman, might have a chat with him, given that I have sent him an email on it. It might be something that could be done for the youth. The larger cities would get free transport for children between the ages of 12 and 18. He might consider supporting that and asking the Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, to support it too.

I ask the Minister, Deputy O’Gorman, to reconsider what I outlined, although I do not know where he will find the money for it. Not everybody goes to a youth club, plays football or is involved in sport. Those youths who are marginalised, and whom we really want to help, may avail of this voucher. It could be considered on a yearly basis, that is, not just this year but down the line. It may prevent other anti-social behaviour manifesting later in life.

Deputy Roderic O’Gorman: I fully agree that investing in our youth is fundamentally important. I have outlined how my Department has done that and will continue to do that. I am always open to considering all avenues. We changed the public health guidelines to ensure that youth services could open even in level 5, albeit in small groups. I talked to a scout leader yesterday whose cubs had met for the first time in level 5, and that was because my Department had examined the matter and is aware that it is really tough for young people. We want to make it as easy as possible for them.

The Senator is correct that not everyone goes to youth groups or plays sport - it might shock Senators that I was not sporty at that age - and we are trying to target those services that give the most widespread benefit. Tens of thousands of young people throughout the country use youth services and we have demonstrated that those who use them get better health outcomes. We are happy to engage with the Senator on ideas and I am always open to considering new solutions.

Fishing Industry

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire ar maidin. Gabhaim mo chomhghairdeas leis as ucht a bheith tofa mar Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara agus guím ádh air sa jab sin.

Senator Pauline O’Reilly: It is not an exaggeration to say there is a crisis in fishing. This week, as expected, saw an increase in overfishing for sprat at Rossaveal. I have been contacted by local fishers in Galway and environmental organisations in recent days, asking me to call on the Minister to act urgently on the hollowing out of marine life along the west coast, and I thank him for coming to the House to address it.

The step taken to ban trawlers of more than 18 m in length from fishing within six nautical miles of the coast has been called one of the most important fisheries policy shifts in the history of the State. It was very much welcomed in a letter sent 13 days ago to the Minister from BirdWatch Ireland, the National Inshore Fishermen’s Association, An Taisce, the Cork

Environmental Forum, the Cork Nature Network, the Coomhola Salmon Trust, Environmental Pillar, Friends of the Irish Environment, the Irish Seal Sanctuary, the Irish Whale and Dolphin Trust, Irish Wildlife Trust, Oceana, Seas at Risk, the Sustainable Water Network and Our Fish. I name all these groups to emphasise the importance of the ban to the public we represent. As the Minister will be aware, it was, devastatingly, overturned on a technicality last summer.

The impact of this has been felt particularly in respect of sprat. Sprat is a keystone species in our bays, vital to the ocean food chain. It is intrinsic to the very ecosystem of the seas around us, feeding fish from herring, mackerel and whitefish to dolphin and porpoise. When pods of dolphins are in the bay, one can be sure they are feeding on sprat. Now, the future of all these species hangs in the balance due to intensive overfishing of their prey. Fishing communities have been left devastated by this intensive trawling, as their stock dries up with nothing to feed on. While it has been found to be legal, that is the issue. It is up to the Minister to legislate and issue policy directives to protect fishing communities and marine life, and to reimplement the ban. Bays act as nurseries for juvenile fish, and with sprat now being used for meal and not for human consumption, there is nothing to stop the very youngest being fished, ground up and sold to farms, including fish, mink and pig farms.

The additional difficulty is that no quotas or total allowable catch exist for sprat fishing, unlike for other pelagic fish such as herring and mackerel. I have heard reports of up to 200 tonnes coming from an area in a single day per fishing pier, the equivalent of 52 million fish. We must act now, when fishing and nature hang in the balance. What is new is that it has reached fever pitch at Rossaveal in Galway over the past week, with more boats arriving than ever before as the season gets going. It is simply not fair or just that our local fishing communities have quotas when there are no quotas or jobs in respect of sprat. Fishers and environmental NGOs have joined together to call for action on this important issue for marine biodiversity, a sustainable industry and the social benefits for life along the west coast, from west Cork to Donegal.

What emergency action can the Minister take to address this urgent issue? The ban is a commitment in the programme for Government. It appears that the justification in the courts for overruling it was based on issues with the public consultation and not with the ban itself. Will the Minister commit to addressing this to reinstate the ban? In the long term, what actions is he taking to stabilise sustainable stocks for our fishing community and nature itself?

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I thank the Senator for bringing this matter to the notice of the House and for ensuring it would be addressed. I welcome the opportunity to come to the House to respond to her and to outline the circumstances as they stand. Sprat, as she will be aware, is a short-lived species that occurs in shore and is an important prey fish for many marine species. It is vital to the ocean food chain, as well as an important source of income for inshore fishermen. The four main fishing grounds for sprat in Ireland are Donegal bay, the Shannon estuary, Kerry bays and Dunmore East. Available scientific information suggests that sprat in Ireland spawn from January to June, with fishing normally taking place from October to Christmas. Sprat is fished mainly for human consumption but the catch may also go into fishmeal. The data available indicate that the percentage of the landings that went into fishmeal was 40% in 2019 and 36% in 2020.

Sprat in Irish waters is not a species subject to fishing quotas or total allowable catches established under EU regulation. Scientifically, relatively little is known about the species. The International Council for Exploration of the Sea, ICES, considers sprat a data-limited stock, which means more detailed data are required to form a full understanding of the nature of the

stock. The central objective of the Common Fisheries Policy is to ensure that fishing and aquaculture activities are environmentally sustainable long term through the conservation and sustainable exploration of marine biological resources and the management of fisheries and fleets exploiting such resources. In addition, Ireland is committed to the conservation of our marine ecosystems, including the seaboards and marine life around our coasts through the birds and habitats directive, among other instruments.

In December 2018, following a public consultation process in which more than 900 submissions were received, the then Minister announced that vessels of more than 18 m would be excluded from trawling in inshore waters inside the six nautical mile zone and baselines from 1 January 2020. A transition period of three years for vessels of more than 18 m targeting sprat was allowed in order to enable adjustment for these vessels, as the sprat fishery is concentrated within the six nautical mile zone. A policy directive was issued by the then Minister, Deputy Creed, to the independent licensing authority for sea-fishing boats under statute and was intended to give effect to the measures announced by the Minister at that time. As stated, this policy directive provided that vessels over 18 m will be excluded from trawling activity inside six nautical miles, including inside the baselines, from 1 January 2020. The policy directive directed the licensing authority to insert a condition to this effect into the licences of affected vessels.

Two applicant fishermen took a judicial review challenging the validity of the policy. On 6 October 2020, the judge held in summary that the court's final order should be, among other matters, a declaration that policy directive 1 of 2019 was made in breach of fair procedures and is void, of no legal effect, or both. The breach of fair procedures as referenced above related to a failure with obligations to consult with the applicants in accordance with, and to the extent required by, the consultation process and in particular by failing to consult with them once a preferred option had been identified.

In the past week the High Court's ruling of judicial review proceedings which relate to policy directive 1 of 2019 has been appealed by the State to the Court of Appeal and a stay is being sought on the orders granted therein. As this matter is *sub judice*, I am not in a position to comment on the policy until the matter can be resolved before the courts.

I am committed to the sustainability of fishing in Irish waters and the commitment made in our programme for Government that inshore waters continue to be protected for smaller fishing vessels and pair trawling be prohibited inside the six-mile limit.

Senator Pauline O'Reilly: I thank the Minister for the update. I welcome that he has sought a stay. We know that more data are required on sprat. From a local perspective, we have seen fishing closed down along Galway Bay and industry lost there as a result of this overfishing. Even though the Minister's reply does not mention Galway, it very much impacts on our communities in Galway, particularly around Rossaveal. What is the Minister doing to collect more data so that we can ascertain the importance of sprat to our local fishing? What steps is he taking for the long-term sustainability of fishing stock? I welcome his actions on the case itself.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: As I outlined in my initial reply, a key measure I am taking is to appeal the ruling to give the courts the opportunity to reflect on the appeal. I am closely monitoring the situation regarding fishing activity. I am working with the Department to ensure that further efforts are made on gathering data. We need to avail of all the resources and capabilities at our disposal to ensure we fully assess and get a better understanding of the sprat fishery and their life cycle. That will inform how we approach the matter and future policy.

11 November 2020

I thank the Senator for bringing this to the attention of the Seanad and I look forward to continuing to engage with her and the Oireachtas on the matter.

Sitting suspended at 11.34 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.

An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business

Senator Lisa Chambers: The Order of Business is No. 1, motion re the arrangements for the sitting of the House on Tuesday, 17 November 2020, to be taken on conclusion of the Order of Business without debate; No. 2, statements on the recognition of Irish military service at Jadotville in 1961, to be taken at 1.15 p.m. and to conclude at 2.45 p.m., with the contribution of group spokespersons not to exceed eight minutes, all other Senators not to exceed five minutes and the Minister to be given no less than six minutes to reply on the debate; No. 3, statements on disability day services, to be taken at 2.45 p.m. and to conclude at 4.15 p.m., with the contribution of all Senators not to exceed six minutes and the Minister to be given no less than six minutes to reply on the debate; and motion 27(7), Private Members' business, to be taken at 4.30 p.m., with the time allocated to this debate not to exceed two hours.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Lombard is leading for Fine Gael.

Senator Tim Lombard: I compliment the Cathaoirleach on the unfortunate weekend his county had. It was a wonderful opportunity-----

An Cathaoirleach: Give a Corkman an inch and he takes a mile. I thank the Senator for his commiserations. I will pass them on to the Kerry team. I am sure it will warm the cockles of their hearts.

Senator Tim Lombard: Absolutely. It was a shame I was not there.

I raise the issue of the Brexit negotiations. We are two months away from the impending date of Brexit and one of the biggest issues that still has to be resolved is that of the fishing industry and how it will deal with whatever the outcome of Brexit will be. One of the most important issues yet to be resolved is that of the fishing industry and how it will deal with whatever the outcome of the Brexit negotiations may be. Many rural and coastal communities from Kerry all the way up the west coast will be deeply affected by the outcome of the negotiations. This is an enormously important issue for us as an island nation. Our fishing industry is one which successive Governments have supported but many feel that we have not supported it enough. That is a big issue for us as a community and a society and probably as a political entity. We must determine the best way to work with the fishing industry in these troublesome months, as well as in the years ahead. It would be appropriate to have a debate in this Chamber on these issues with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. There is a great fear in the fishing community that it will be left behind and will be the sacrificial lamb in the Brexit negotiations. We need to bring clarity and confidence to the industry, which is going through a troubling time at the moment. The debate I seek will enable us to air the important issues and bring the key ones to the fore. It will also provide the Minister with an opportunity to update us on what will happen in the next seven and a half weeks. If things do not go well for the fishing industry over the next few weeks, the repercussions for rural Ireland will be immense.

We must support our fishing industry and people in rural Ireland and the debate I seek would play a significant part in that. I ask the Leader to invite the Minister to the House next week to provide clarity on the future for our fishing industry and to ease the genuine worries of our fishing communities.

Senator Sharon Keogan: I wish to raise an issue that I have raised a number of times previously, namely, the Moorhead report and the total disrespect shown to this House by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, and the Minister of State at the same Department, Deputy Burke, in not coming here to discuss it with us. It should not be forgotten that 49 of the Senators in this House are here because of the 949 locally elected councillors in this country. There was a debate in this House yesterday on the relevance of the Seanad and I find it amazing that 49 of us have not done our best for the councillors on the ground who are working day in and day out for less than the current pandemic unemployment payment, PUP, rate. We must address the issue of the value of local councillors within the local government system and how we view them. It is important that the Minister and Minister of State would come into this House to discuss their views on the Moorhead report. The buck stops with Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party and their party leaders. We have had enough talk about this issue. Senators should not hang their heads; they should do something to deliver for local councillors in this country. There is never a good time to talk about this and me raising it again today will make absolutely no difference. The buck stops with the Senators and Deputies from the Government parties and their leaders and I urge them to do their very best in this regard.

I have just come from a meeting of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Union Affairs. We could strengthen the position of councillors by creating a European affairs committee at local level. I raised this issue with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Coveney, a few years ago but that call has also fallen on deaf ears. If we want more citizen engagement *vis-à-vis* Europe going forward then we need to strengthen the value we place on the EU at local level. We can do that very easily through local government. I ask the Leader of the House, Senator Doherty, to invite the Minister of State or the Minister to the House to outline their views on the Moorhead report and discuss the value of local councillors throughout the country.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I thank the Leader for facilitating the debate today on non-Government motion No.5 proposed by my colleague Senator Mark Wall on the siege of Jadotville. I am really glad that we have Government time today to debate that issue, which is of interest to quite a number of Members.

I also renew calls on the Leader for a debate on the gender pay gap. Monday was Equal Pay Day and I know that colleagues spoke yesterday in this House of the need to bring forward legislation urgently to tackle Ireland's continuing gender pay gap, which stands at 14.4%. Colleagues may be aware that in the previous Seanad my Labour Party colleagues and I introduced a Bill which passed all Stages in this House that required companies with more than 50 employees to publish anonymised data showing whether a gender pay gap existed in their organisation. Unfortunately, although the Bill passed Second Stage in the Dáil, it has been stagnated there and the Government has not made any progress on furthering the action needed to tackle the gender pay gap. We know that action is needed or the pay gap will simply increase. I know that the Deputy Leader is also anxious to see action taken on this and I ask her facilitate a debate in this House on how best to move forward with legislation on tackling the gender pay gap without delay.

Finally, on the issue of citizenship, the Labour Party also brought forward a Private Member's Bill in the last term which passed Second Stage in this House. We will be dealing with Committee Stage of that Bill on 2 December. I ask the Deputy Leader to seek Government support for the provisions in that Bill. It is hugely important and would go some way towards reversing the effect of the 2004 citizenship referendum by restoring citizenship or at least the right to apply for citizenship to children born in Ireland. It is a hugely important issue. Labour Youth launched its Born Here, Belong Here campaign last week about which I spoke in this House, which seeks to encourage greater support for this concept. I ask the Deputy Leader to make inquiries as to whether the Government will support the Bill on Committee Stage. It is hugely important. The number of children affected is small but this is a very significant issue for them and their families. We have heard reports of healthcare workers on the front line who are also facing an uncertain future because they are not sure if they will be granted the right to remain in Ireland. Clearly we need to be more generous in our approach to citizenship. It is in our own interests as a society but also in the interests of the children who were born in Ireland and whose status remains uncertain in some cases. I ask the Deputy Leader to pursue those issues and I again commend Labour Youth on its work on this.

Senator Róisín Garvey: I seek the support of the House regarding an important issue that has come to light recently and which is prevalent in every county in Ireland, namely, the lack of second-level autism spectrum disorder, ASD, units. The number of diagnosed cases of autism is increasing all over the country but we have failed to take this into account and to create the necessary spaces at second level. We are doing much better at primary level in the provision of ASD units but autism does not go away. If we have ASD units in our primary schools then we also need them in our secondary schools but to date we have not been doing that. I will bring this up with the Minister for Education but I would like the support of this House on it because this is an issue in every county in Ireland.

I will relate a couple of stories to illustrate my point. A woman in Sixmilebridge told me that eight children in the local primary school are looking for a place in the closest second-level ASD unit. Up to now these children and their families have supported one another but now they are in competition with one another because there is only one place available. That is an horrific situation. I have worked with people with autism and I have friends with children with autism. It should not be left to parents to fight individual campaigns to get the services their children need, especially as they progress to secondary school. As we all know, adolescence is a challenge at the best of times but it is even more of a challenge for those with autism who cannot always express themselves.

Autism is on the increase but statistically we find that ASD units are more often attached to DEIS schools than non-DEIS schools which disgusts me. Furthermore, they are not allowed in private schools, which are funded by the taxpayer, which is also despicable. There is no socioeconomic correlation with autism. It is not the case that those from a certain socioeconomic background have more of a chance of being diagnosed with autism. In that context, there is no reason for attaching ASD units to DEIS schools and not to other schools. We must have equity on every level. We are sending out the wrong message to our children when we attach ASD units to certain types of schools. We really need to rectify that.

I think everyone in the House would agree that we want equality when it comes to where we place ASD units, and we want to increase the number of ASD units we have. Currently, for every three children with autism, we have one place in secondary school, and the situation is only going to get worse. The actual statistic is 2.69, but children are not statistics, they are whole

numbers. For me, 2.69 is three human beings for every one place. That means two of them will not have a place. If they have come from an ASD unit in primary school, they will have thrived. These units are amazing. The people who work in them are incredible. Parents are so happy to see their children thriving and it is barbaric to think that after eight years of support, when they leave sixth class they would not have that continuity in secondary school. Let us push this agenda as a House.

We must also up our game when it comes to training. We need to do more training to ensure more people can deal with children in autism units in both primary and secondary school environments. We need to up our game in terms of training as well, whether it is a special needs assistant or just somebody in the environment. I ask the House to support me today on the need to further increase the number of ASD units in all types of school, not just in DEIS schools.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: Yesterday in the House, I encouraged Members to remember and to remain steadfast in encouraging support from the new US Administration for the Good Friday Agreement, for the peace process and for progress more generally here in Ireland against the impending reckless threat posed to us by Brexit. I was very encouraged to see reported in the media last night that President-elect Biden had a phone call with the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, where he referenced those commitments to the Good Friday Agreement and to Ireland. The worrying and very telling point to emerge from that exchange, as we understand it, is that the read-out from the US side referenced this exchange but the read-out from the British Government side did not even make reference to the fact that it was raised by President-elect Biden during the conversation.

The British Government is a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement. It is bound under international law to uphold the agreement. We know the peril in which it has been knowingly placed by the British Government entering into the Brexit agenda and taking no consideration of the Good Friday Agreement and the implications for Ireland. This close to the end of the transition period, it is telling that the British Government would not even reference the fact that the matter was raised by the US Administration. That is particularly telling, but I also take a degree of heart from the fact that it still remains to the fore of the new Administration's agenda.

I was thinking about this on the way down to Dublin. If I have to, I will raise it every day on the Order of Business between now and the end of the year. I will take the opportunity where it is needed to encourage the steadfastness to remain. I know, by and large, that thankfully we have been and are at one in these Houses on this issue but in the middle of everything else, as the clock ticks down further, it is very important that we remain alert to these issues.

I appreciate that we will have the opportunity with the new omnibus Bill coming through the House to discuss some of these issues, but in the previous Seanad, to be fair to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, he did come before us regularly to update us on the negotiations. I know the Deputy Leader has a particular interest in this issue. At the earliest opportunity, we should hear from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, specifically on the Brexit negotiations.

Senator Eileen Flynn: I support the call for a debate on fishing. Fishing is a very important part of life in rural Donegal and a very important way of making a living.

A report this week showed the need for Government support to make sure all women have equal access to domestic violence services. A new report from Safe Ireland shows that approximately 3,450 women and 589 children contacted domestic violence services for the first time

during the first six months of the Covid pandemic. That breaks down to 19 women and three children per day. The monthly number of women calling helplines has risen month-on-month since April. We must not forget that men also suffer domestic violence and need support services. Equal access to domestic violence services has always been a problem, and it has gotten worse in the pandemic.

Women face many barriers on a daily basis when they try to escape. The barriers include cultural barriers and practical barriers, for example, not having money or not having a car to help one escape if one is living in a rural area or one does not have supports to get to a safe refuge. Because of cuts to funding, the amount of time a woman can stay in a refuge has been reduced. In most cases, it is a matter of weeks. If we are being honest, it can take a year for some women to recover. We must bear in mind that it takes some women ten to 15 years to get away from a household where there is domestic violence. Women need a lot of support to get away and they need to be supported to be empowered and not just to be in a service for six or seven weeks and then to be made homeless on the streets, as that causes women to go back to their abuser.

The Government must invest in domestic violence services to support women and men in this country to be able to get away. Many women experiencing domestic violence have come to me seeking support, who want to get away from their abuser. I wish to drive this message home today: nobody knows the shoe is cutting them, only the person who is wearing them. We always blame women for the situation they are in but it is not the woman's fault. I call on the Government to support the services, to support Safe Ireland and other women's organisations.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Senator Flynn for raising the issue.

Senator Timmy Dooley: As you well know, a Chathaoirligh, there is widespread support for the decarbonisation of electricity generation, but in doing so we must be very careful and understand the impact that is having on many communities throughout the country. The development of onshore wind turbines is affecting a number of communities in my constituency. Their big concern is that, as of yet, the revised wind energy development guidelines have not been published. They are due to be published later this year. However, there are currently developments before the local authorities based on the old guidelines. The old guidelines relate to the capture of wind when turbines were much smaller. Many of the turbines now being proposed for installation throughout the country are 170 m or perhaps greater than that in height. That kind of infrastructure is having a detrimental impact on the visual amenity of the area. There is a greater possibility for noise and shadow flicker spreading over a much wider area. The real concern in these communities is that existing applications are being assessed under guidelines that are out of date. Their request to us is to put a block on the applications that are currently in train and that planning applications would be stalled in order to allow for the new guidelines to be introduced. I call on the Deputy Leader to try to arrange a debate here, without delay, with the appropriate Minister from a planning perspective and a climate change perspective. While we all share in wanting decarbonisation to take place for the benefit of the environment, we should ensure that we do not put an undue burden on the many people who will be impacted.

We also need to look at how quickly we can move wind turbines offshore. It is well recognised now that the best quality wind can be captured offshore and as a small island we have no shortage of oceans around us. We need to lead the way in the capture of offshore wind energy. It is the right thing to do for the environment but also for communities who are currently under pressure in that regard.

Senator Mary Seery Kearney: In supporting Senator Garvey's comments on autism spectrum disorder, ASD, units, I know the Minister of State, Deputy Madigan, is highly cognisant of where the gaps are. Only last week there was an announcement of 25 new units in primary schools. I am working with the Dublin 12 campaign for an autism-specific school and Involve Autism. I am very much aware that issues presented to the Minister of State are being dealt with very effectively and efficiently. In my own area of Dublin 6 and Dublin 6 west, and if we include Dublin 4, there are 9,000 school places but only 14 autism-specific places.

I call for the House to have some sort of debate to address the reality of our services working from home. Currently, there are people working in public and private services working from home in what may not be ideal circumstances. They might not be conducive to normal flow and work patterns. Working from home in an unplanned way at the height of a pandemic has not necessarily lent itself to the efficient outworking of the public services, or, indeed, private services. I really appreciate the really hard work that has gone on. This is a very real issue. I have spent six weeks trying to get personal public service, PPS, numbers and there are delays across all Departments. We get told that a person is in an office on his or her own and that is if we get through to somebody. We need a debate that addresses the reality that because of the circumstances, everything has slowed and there will be a backlog. Supports will be needed and we require a discussion on how to address this after the pandemic. We should get ready now.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: It is just after the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month and I pay tribute to the former taoisigh, Enda Kenny and Deputy Leo Varadkar, as well as the current Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, who all attended remembrance services at Enniskillen. It is great that Ireland has grown up and comes to remember the approximately 30,000 Irish men and women who lost their lives in the First World War and the Second World War. It is truly great that we are now able to remember them openly.

An issue has arisen in the past few days that is quite disturbing. In my six years here I have never seen sharp practice but I am beginning to see it now. A number of local authority members have contacted me because they are getting information sent to their inboxes before it is put in the public domain. They are getting it from members of the Government parties, which is simply wrong.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Senator is a good man to text and email councillors himself.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I hope the clock has been stopped.

Senator Sharon Keogan: That language is not called for.

An Cathaoirleach: Under Standing Orders, if Senator Buttimer wishes to intervene, he should ask permission.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Fair enough.

An Cathaoirleach: These are the rules of the House.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I know the rules of the House.

An Cathaoirleach: If you know the rules, please follow them.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: All of us in the House are elected and we are all public representatives. We are all peers in the House. None of us has the right to information ahead

of anybody else.

I will write today to the Secretaries General of every Department to ask them to take on their responsibility as the administrative heads of their Departments to ensure all Members of this House and the Dáil are treated equally. I understand the cut and thrust of politics and that we all try to make names for ourselves. Every now and then we take on a bit of showmanship. It is the nature of the game we are in. Ultimately, the people we represent in this House and those of us elected through the local authority system are entitled to feel they are getting equal representation across all parties and none. It is sharp practice when we start to see this. I have never seen it before.

Senator Buttimer indicated I send stuff, and I do, but I have never been privy to something before it is published. It is wrong and it debases every single one of us when we see that happen. Ultimately, we have a responsibility not just to those who elect us but to the national interest we are here to represent. We are Members of Seanad Éireann; we are not county councillors or Deputies. We are national politicians with a national focus on what we do. We are here to scrutinise Government legislation, not to try to capitalise on the inside track. That is part of what debases politics in this country.

There are some very sound people in this room. Some people I have great respect for and some people respect me while others do not. Some are friends and some are not friends. Ultimately, I recognise the right of everybody here to be treated equally and I ask for nothing more or nothing less.

Senator Malcolm Byrne: I echo the remarks of Senator Garvey relating to ASD units.

I also echo the remarks of Senator Ó Donnghaile. It was telling that US President-elect Biden called just six leaders last night and one of those was the Taoiseach. I hope that is a sign of the continued strong relationship between Ireland and the United States.

I raise the question of the fair deal scheme and the long-standing commitment to address the discrimination against farms and small businesses. Members are aware that those who avail of the fair deal scheme see assets charged at a rate of 7.5%, and this is capped after three years for the family home. This does not apply to family farms and small businesses. This is clearly a disincentive when it comes to succession and inheritance, and it is also quite worrying for many families. A family member may have to go to a nursing home, for example, because of age or potentially degenerative illness, which would be worse.

There has been a commitment for six years from the Government to address this. I know the heads of a Bill were prepared prior to the general election for this to be done. As I understand it, the matter rests with the Minister of State, Deputy Butler, and I ask that it be regarded as a priority. There are only approximately 700 farm families currently availing of the fair deal scheme. The lack of certainty and a failure to deliver on something that was a very clear Government commitment is a matter of concern. The Minister of State, Deputy Butler, has said it is a priority but I ask that the matter be stressed to the Government.

Senator Micheál Carrigy: I support Senator Byrne's comments on the fair deal scheme and it is extremely important that this be legislated for immediately.

I raise the question of the possible temporary lifting of QQI level 5 qualification requirements for people working in childcare. Following the recent HSE announcement on the lifting

of this requirement in order to become a carer, I ask if a similar action could be taken with the childcare sector. In the first lockdown in March, it was clear to see how essential childcare services are, especially in these unprecedented times when people cannot expect grandparents or other family members to care for their children if they must work.

Since opening on 29 June, childcare services have been under great strain in trying to maintain proper adult-child ratios due to staff shortages. The sector is facing a major crisis, with increased demand for childcare professionals, but there has been a decrease in the number of courses provided to allow eager and suitable candidates to become qualified professionals before joining the sector. It would be a major benefit to the sector and to all children and parents relying on childcare facilities if the requirement for a minimum level 5 qualification were to be lifted temporarily. Providing more training at an affordable price would allow eligible candidates to be trained.

A number of providers have contacted me about staff who were unwell and unable to attend work at short notice, as well as staff who travelled outside the country or had to go into isolation. Others could not attend work due to personal circumstances. It is very difficult for providers to give the high-quality service that they strive to achieve. All the staff on the floor are under extra pressure and are thinly stretched. Often, rooms must be closed temporarily and sometimes children who require assistance under the access and inclusion model are unable to attend if the staff are not available to meet individual care needs. If we could recruit suitable candidates who are currently completing or are willing to enrol to complete the necessary training it would be a huge support to help get services through these unprecedented times. Any staff would be fully trained and would work alongside trained and experienced staff so they would not be on their own. I urge the lifting of the level 5 requirements as soon as possible before it leads to more closures. Unfortunately, many services have been forced to permanently close their doors as a result of the restrictions.

Senator Rebecca Moynihan: I want to raise the issue of purpose-built student accommodation being granted planning permission for short-term use as tourist or visitor accommodation. There are guidelines for purpose-built student accommodation. I do not think anyone could argue that we do not need some purpose-built student accommodation but what we have seen since the guidelines were introduced is luxury accommodation being built in the wrong places, specifically in the inner city. In my own area, we have just under 4,000 units of purpose-built student accommodation, hotel units or aparthotels or transient units within a very small area in the Liberties, Dublin 8. Most recently, the local authority has granted 1,600 beds of purpose-built student accommodation the right in the short term to change over to holiday or tourist accommodation or to be used as general worker accommodation. This is developers gaming the system and gaming the guidelines that were allowed. They pretended that they were building purpose-built student accommodation but were actually doing what they had always wanted, which is tourist accommodation thus undermining long-term housing, affordable student accommodation and the hotel industry.

The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage needs to come into this House to address this matter. He must also say whether he will issue guidelines to local authorities on change of use or else ban purpose-built student accommodation, which we have been told that we need, from being changed into co-living by the back door. I ask him to come in here and inform us what he will do.

I am quite concerned about recent newspaper reports in *The Sunday Times*. The Minister,

when he was Opposition spokesperson, said that co-living was not a solution to the housing crisis. I see from leaks from the Department that it looks like co-living will be tinkered with as opposed to its removal altogether.

Finally, I commend Councillor Eva Dowling from Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council on securing support for her motion on maternity leave for councillors within Dún Laoghaire. This is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed because women councillors are particularly affected by a lack of maternity and paternity leave.

Senator Ollie Crowe: I want to address the issue of bars and restaurants re-opening on Tuesday, 1 December. I noted the comments made by the Chief Medical Officer this week expressing doubt that such advice would be given. It is essential that we approach this from a realistic angle. Perhaps 2020 has been the toughest year in the history of the State so people will at least like to socialise for Christmas. In the absence of pubs and restaurants the inevitable reality is, as we have seen previously, that house parties will happen everywhere.

The data on outbreaks and clusters, as the Cathaoirleach will be aware, from the Health Protection Surveillance Centre make it clear such house parties are a far bigger problem than bars and restaurants that act responsibly, follow guidelines and have controlled environments. The data reflect that of 6,700 clusters, less than 1% are related to pubs or restaurant settings. We have proven, under Government guidelines, that in late June there was no increase in the infection rate attributed to pubs and restaurants. Naturally, the National Public Health Emergency Team, NPHE, is going to recommend that restaurants and pubs remain closed. Its focus, rightly, is on Covid-19 rather than on the broader range of issues the Government needs to consider. I imagine that NPHE would like everyone to stay at home until a vaccine is rolled out but the Government needs to be more realistic. That is not going to happen and the Government must consider human nature.

The hospitality sector, as we all know, has been hammered by the pandemic. As I come from that background, I can state with certainty that December is a crucial month that provides income to cover the lean months ahead until St. Patrick's Day. Thousands of small businesses that employ tens of thousands of people across the country currently face an uncertain future and wonder if they will survive a crisis not of their making.

I will make a final vital point about a two-tier economy. The fact is that the thousands of people who work in this industry will not have money for Christmas. They are in receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment, which will put these workers and their families under severe financial pressure. As we all know, gatherings will happen in December. Therefore, controlled environments such as pubs and restaurants are a far safer option to protect public health than uncontrolled settings that house parties provide.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I apologise to the Cathaoirleach but it is disingenuous of Members to come in here and claim different things. We are a political people and we are entitled, as Members, to share information just as Departments are entitled to share information. Senator Craughwell is a good man to give it but he had better take it as well. I apologise to the Cathaoirleach as it would not be my intent to be disrespectful.

An Cathaoirleach: I have no problem with Senator Buttimer intervening in the speech of Senator Craughwell. Just follow the procedures under Standing Orders.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I appreciate that.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: I hope that information was sent to Senator Craughwell as well.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I did not hear the Senator and ask him to repeat what he said.

Senator Ollie Crowe: Please show respect for Members who are not in the House

An Cathaoirleach: I remind Senator Buttimer and the Deputy Whip that Standing Order 39 relates to them as well. Senator Buttimer has one minute and 20 seconds.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I can assure Senator Gallagher that when it comes to the collective sharing of information, we can do that. I am sure that he knows what I mean by that.

A Chathaoirligh, I ask that the Minister for Health comes to the House as a matter of urgency. There is absolute confusion around the flu vaccine this morning. At the time of a pandemic, there is a need for certainty and confidence in the Health Service Executive. GPs are sharing information with us regarding the availability, non-availability or suspension of the administration of the flu vaccine. If Members who are in government today were on the other side of the House, they would be in here roaring and proposing an amendment to the Order of the Business to have the Minister come to the House. This is a matter for the HSE. Dr. Colm Henry appeared on “Morning Ireland” this morning but there is an absolute need for clarity and certainty for GPs and pharmacists around reimbursement but also among the people, na gnáth daoine, the most vulnerable of whom are in need of the flu vaccine.

I ask that the Minister for Health comes to this House to address the reimbursement of pharmacists and GPs, plus the availability of the flu vaccine. Do we have a plan for the future, in the coming weeks, to distribute the flu vaccine? This is not a partisan matter but one of public health.

Senator Lynn Boylan: I request that the Minister for Transport comes before the Seanad to outline how he intends to tackle the massive driving test backlog. The number of people waiting for a test has increased by 70% since he took over his Department in June.

This week, the Road Safety Authority has confirmed that there are now over 90,000 people awaiting a driving test. A quarter of those waiting are in Dublin with Tallaght making up 10% of that with a shocking 9,323 people who are waiting to complete their driving test. This means there will be people who will be forced to wait until late 2021 to complete their test. This situation is simply not acceptable. We know that public transport is down to 25% capacity and the public advice on Covid quite rightly prevents car pooling.

The failure to complete a driving test is leaving many people having to pass up on job offers as they are predicated on them having a full driving licence. To make matters even worse, the driver theory test has been suspended until early December thus creating another backlog in those needing to learn how to drive. It is obvious that there is a clear need for additional driving instructors and testers. Likewise, the Minister needs to urgently consult instructors, testers and their unions to find a way forward in order that we can accelerate the number of tests that can be carried out safely over the coming months.

We all want more public transport and active mobility solutions, including good quality cycle lanes. The Minister’s failure to deal with the driving test backlog is leaving people isolated, in particular in rural Ireland, and it is locking others out of employment. I ask that the

Minister come before this House and set out clearly the strategy he intends to take to deal with the backlog and crisis.

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: I wish to speak about the Safe Ireland report published yesterday. I am conscious it was mentioned earlier. The research is traumatic. It is deeply upsetting to see how many people are suffering from domestic violence. The number of women and children who contacted services for the very first time during the first six months of the Covid pandemic is eye watering. Some 3,450 women and 589 children contacted domestic violence services for the very first time. That is the equivalent of 19 women and three children every day, or about 25% of the total number of women and children who contact domestic violence services.

While there is no doubt that we are living in the middle of a Covid pandemic, there is also a pandemic in respect of domestic violence. It is incumbent on every one of us to fight for women and men who suffer from domestic violence, in particular given that there are more women than ever in the Seanad. We need to stand firm and strong with our peers who are undergoing domestic violence.

There are 158 shelter spaces available for women who are victims of domestic violence in this country. There was a commitment in the programme for Government that there would be an increase in the number of places, but it is of paramount importance that extra work is done to provide resources for victims who need to use domestic refuge centres. I want to pay particular tribute to Teach Tearmainn in Kildare which does incredible work. We also need to work with local authorities to ensure victims have the opportunity to have permanent housing.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: Following on from my colleague, Senator O'Loughlin, I would like to talk about the same subject. Safe Ireland, the national domestic violence agency, works with 39 front-line services throughout the length and breadth of the country. In my area, Monaghan and Cavan, I know Tearmann does fantastic work and I want to compliment it on the fantastic service it provides.

The report being discussed today makes for very grim reading. The report, which was carried out from March of this year, covers a six-month period. I found the content of the report alarming and heartbreaking. During that six-month period, 3,450 women and 589 children contacted a domestic support hotline for the very first time. Some 32,941 telephone calls were answered, an average of 184 calls per day. It is important that we pause and remember that behind the 184 calls every day is a broken family in turmoil and living in fear of their circumstances. When I think of that, I think of the families who have yet to pick up the phone and make the call. I encourage them to do so and reach out for help because help is there.

Sadly and shockingly, 191 women and 280 children are living in domestic abuse accommodation every month. Even more shockingly, 1,351 requests for refuge could not be provided due to a lack of space. Service providers have been promised additional funding across a number of Departments, but they want the funding made available to them to be ring-fenced for their use. I ask that information be provided to them as soon as possible.

Senator Lisa Chambers: Senator Lombard raised the issue of Brexit, in particular fisheries. I concur with him. In my county of Mayo, fishing is an industry that still employs people. Senator Flynn also raised the issue. It is one of the few remaining issues to be resolved in the Brexit negotiations. The UK knows it is of considerable importance to Ireland and that is why

it has not been resolved to date. I am not sure if we will get a resolution to the level of satisfaction that we want. The matter is still under discussion.

Senator Keogan raised the issue of the Moorhead report. We spoke earlier about the need for greater engagement at a council level on matters regarding the EU. In regard to the Conference on the Future of Europe, if we are going to engage with citizens across the board it would be much easier if we had proper structures in place at local level. It is helping us to highlight the deficiencies. I agree with her. In terms of the Moorhead report, I will make contact with the Minister of State, Deputy Peter Burke, and the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, to seek a date to discuss the report at the earliest possible opportunity.

I disagree that we have let councillors down. From the perspective of Fianna Fáil, we have not been in government for the past five years. Since coming into government, the report has been published and there is a commitment on page 119 of the programme for Government to address it. That is a positive step in the right direction.

I note that Senator Bacik welcomed the Jadotville debate later today and Senator Wall's involvement in that motion.

I am sure Senator Bacik will have seen that the Cathaoirleach has selected the elimination of the gender pay gap as the first item to be discussed in terms of the labour panel engagement with stakeholders, which is a very positive move for Seanad Éireann. I look forward to engaging on that topic. It is an issue of particular interest to me.

I also want to acknowledge the work that the Labour Party has done in terms of a Bill on transparency around the gender pay gap in organisations with more than 50 employees. I would fully support that. We need movement on that. Until companies are transparent and can be seen warts and all, I do not think we will see considerable movement on the issue. Senator Garvey raised the issue of second level ASD units. It is a major issue. We can bring it down to the human impact on individuals. She spoke about eight children having grown up together as friends, but who are now being pitted against one another for a single place. That shows that there is a failure in the school system. I will pass those requests to the Minister, Deputy Foley, to see whether we can get some action on that as soon as possible. I also know she was supported by Senators Byrne and Seery Kearney on that issue.

I agree with Senator Ó Donnghaile that it is very welcome to note that conversations happened yesterday with the UK Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on the Good Friday Agreement and many other issues in respect of the US presidency. The Taoiseach congratulated President-elect Joe Biden on his historic win and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris on her significant and historic win. She is the first black woman to take up the position of Vice President-elect and I am sure she will look at the top job in four years' time. I congratulate the Cathaoirleach, along with the Ceann Comhairle, on being very quick off the mark in issuing an invitation to President-elect Biden to address both Houses of the Oireachtas at the earliest possible opportunity. We all look forward to that happening. I suggest that the Cathaoirleach extend the same invitation to Vice President-elect Harris. I am sure we would love to hear from her. I agree with Senator Ó Donnghaile that we need to keep the Good Friday Agreement on the agenda and continue to remind the British Government that it is a co-guarantor of the Agreement. It is quite telling that they neglected to mention that the topic was raised with them by President-elect Biden. I am very glad that the US President-elect has publicly acknowledged that he sees it as a priority for his presidency, as do we.

Senator Flynn raised the issue of the Safe Ireland report, as did Senators O'Loughlin and Gallagher. I concur with what all Members have said on this issue. It is the hidden trauma and cost of the pandemic. Men and women are affected, but it is predominantly women who are at home in very tense environments with their abusers. That women have made a step forward to try to escape that situation yet find themselves with no refuge to go to is quite shocking. I am not sure which Senator mentioned the figure, but I read that it takes in excess of 30 incidents of domestic violence for a woman to leave a situation, and it can take many more. The actual act of getting up and leaving is huge and cannot be underestimated. For women to find they have nowhere to turn and have to return to where they came from is a massive failure of the system.

Senator Dooley raised the issue of the decarbonisation of electricity generation, and the impact of turbines on communities. I absolutely agree on that. It is a debate we have in Mayo as well. The size of turbines has increased, but the fact they are being given planning permission under old guidelines is just wrong. We need to bring communities with us because they want to play their part in the greener production of electricity. Offshore wind farms are where it is at and there is huge potential on the west coast for it, but onshore wind farms will also be part of the solution. However, we cannot just bulldoze those through communities and fail to facilitate communities coming on board. It looks very underhanded that we are using old guidelines to bring through what is new technology. It is not fair play with communities which are not stupid, will see it for what it is and will object to them all the way. It is hard to disagree with them on that point.

Senator Seery Kearney raised the issue of ASD units. I welcome her comments on the Minister of State, Deputy Madigan's work on this issue, and I look forward to hearing more about it. The Minister of State would be welcome to come before the House at some point to outline her work in that particular area.

Senator Craughwell raised the issue of sharp practice. I am not sure that I can provide the Senator with any reassurance that the leaking of information will cease any time soon. There was significant debate on a similar and related matter in the Dáil last night. It is part and parcel of political life. I can assure the Senator that I have never put out information that was not publicly available beforehand, but at the same time, I note that other Senators have commented on the fact that perhaps the Senator himself is quite prone to contacting councillors. In any event, I do not think it is the pressing issue of the day.

Senator Byrne raised the issue of the fair deal scheme and its impact on farming families. I know from dealing directly with families that the question of whether or not a loved one will go into a nursing home is at the forefront of their minds, even though the loved one might really need that care. However, the loss of the family farm is not only about the loss of income and the economic side of it, but there is also a huge attachment to the family farm that may have been passed down through generations. If that cap is not applied to the family farm as well as the home, the family farm could be so devalued that it is of no use to anybody. From a Fianna Fáil perspective, protecting the small family farm is at the core of what we are about - it is party policy - and we need to see action on that issue immediately.

Senator Carrigy raised the issue of the level 5 qualification requirement for childcare workers. I take a slightly different view on the issue. Having listened to childcare workers, they want to see value attached to the qualifications that they have. Many of those working in the childcare sector have levels 6, 7 and 8 qualifications. If we want to increase the number of people working in the childcare sector, we must pay them properly and not underestimate the

work they do. There is a reason they are not staying in the sector: it is because they are paid a pittance. It is no coincidence that it is primarily a female profession and it is only beginning to get air time now. In no small part, this is because the workers have become unionised and the issue has been increasingly debated in both Houses of the Oireachtas in recent times. It is incumbent on all Members to do more to make sure that those in the childcare sector are paid properly. During this pandemic, we have seen the impact that having no childcare has on the country. The whole country comes to a halt because parents need childcare to go to work, and people need to go to work to keep the economy running, so it is all part of the same circle.

Senator Moynihan raised the issue of the change of use of purpose-built student accommodation into holiday apartments. If that is what companies, landlords and builders are doing, then we need to put a stop to it because that is not what the law was intended for. If they are circumventing the rules, and if those rules need to be tightened, then we will do that. In the short term, because of the pandemic and the fact that many of the students are at home, if there is a change of use to allow emergency workers to use the accommodation, then that is fine because it is a genuine change of use. However, if there is an underhandedness to it, and I will certainly bring it to the attention of the Minister, then we need to put a stop to it. It is a significant development for the community in Dublin 8 to have a development of that size, and if it is being used to undercut hospitality businesses in the area and to bring in with co-living through the back door. That is not something Fianna Fáil or the Government would support. I thank the Senator for raising the issue because this is the place do so.

Senator Crowe raised the issue of bars and restaurants. I note he is anticipating what the Chief Medical Officer might suggest in terms of his advices. I know Dr. Holohan will not be drawn on what his advices might be and he is, of course, waiting until he gets the latest data before making any announcement. I agree with the Senator on the impact of restrictions on the hospitality sector and the knock-on effect impact on families because it affects their income. Many of them are on much less income than they would be if they were back earning. I note also that the Christmas period is when many hospitality businesses make their money to survive the first six months of the year until they get back into the summer period. It is therefore of huge concern and I agree with the Senator that the Government needs to take into account not just the public health aspect, but also the social and economic aspect of restrictions. To date, I think it has done so and it did not go to level 5 restrictions straight away in that there was a period of a few weeks lead-in to try to prepare better for them. There is a real cognisance of the impact of restrictions. All we can do for bars and restaurants is to use any opportunity we have to get a takeaway and support our local business because every little bit helps in these months. Drinking pints out in the cold is not something we do in the west of Ireland because in the winter months, it is almost a necessity to drink indoors but it is different in the summertime. I am hopeful that we can protect those businesses over the winter months.

Senator Buttimer raised the issue of the flu vaccine. I only know what the Senator knows on what has been reported this morning. I have not received an update from the Minister for Health on that particular issue. I find it very hard to believe that 600,000 flu vaccines have gone missing. I am sure that in the coming days we will get a reasonable explanation as to why that is. I note that some GPs have said they have been so busy that they have not had time to process the paperwork and to put in the claims for the flu vaccines, so that might account for some of the discrepancy. We should wait to hear back from the Minister for Health on the issue, following his engagement with the HSE and with GPs on the issue. I am sure there is an explanation for it because 600,000 vaccines do not just go missing. They are somewhere and I have no doubt

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that they will be found. We will seek an update for the Senator from the Minister for Health on the issue.

Senator Boyhan raised the issue of the backlog in driver tests. I am aware that this has been raised previously by Senators Burke and Byrne and it is a massive issue. I note that Ógra Fianna Fáil is running a campaign on this issue because it is affecting many younger drivers who are getting on the road for the first time. There is a 30-week backlog, which really needs to be addressed. I was not aware of the concentration of the backlog in the Tallaght, in particular, and it is clearly not fair that one community is more affected than others. There should be a reallocation of resources to tackle that particular issue because clearly that is well above the backlog in other areas.

Senator O'Loughlin raised the issue of Safe Ireland. The UN's International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is 25 November and I have been informed that the Minister for Justice intends to come before this House the day before on 24 November to discuss her plans around supporting women in situations of domestic violence. During the pandemic, an additional €2.1 million was allocated to services to try to address the deficiency in services and supports. I know that An Garda Síochána and the Courts Service are prioritising those cases, so efforts are being made. However, when one looks at the numbers, which were highlighted by Senator Gallagher also, of 3,450 women and 589 children who contacted services in that six-month period, and 90 women and three children per day, it is quite stark. Women are bearing the brunt of this, it is having an impact on children at a young age, and it needs to be addressed. I look forward to hearing from the Minister for Justice on 24 November as to what her plans are in the Department of Justice to tackle this issue.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank the Deputy Leader for her suggestion to invite Vice President-elect Harris to address the Seanad. I will send that letter, perhaps to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the sitting of First Seanad, which will be in 2022.

Order of Business agreed to.

Sitting Arrangements: Motion

Senator Lisa Chambers: I move:

That, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders relative to Public Business:

The Seanad on its rising on Wednesday, 11th November, 2020, shall adjourn until 10.30 a.m. on Tuesday, 17th November, 2020 and the following arrangements shall apply:

(a) The Order of Business shall be proposed at 10.30 a.m. in the Dáil Chamber;

(b) Commencement matters shall be taken at 1.30 p.m. in the Seanad Chamber;

(c) Business ordered to be taken subsequent to Commencement matters, shall be taken in the Seanad Chamber.

Question put and agreed to.

Recognition of Irish Military Service at Jadotville in 1961: Statements

An Cathaoirleach: The non-commissioned officers and men of A Company and attached 35th Infantry Battalion, United Nations forces in Congo took responsibility for the UN post at Jadotville on 3 September 1961. On 9 September, they were surrounded by a large force of Katangese gendarmerie. Early on the morning of 13 September, the company came under attack, which it endured almost continuously until 17 September. Despite its courageous resistance, A Company was taken captive. By this time, A Company had run out of water and several of its men were wounded. Their sacrifices in the service of peace are remembered with pride.

From Jadotville garrison, A Company and attached 35th Infantry Battalion, I mention Commandant Patrick Quinlan. I mention captains: Dermot Byrne; William Donnelly; and Thomas McGuinn. I mention lieutenants: William Carey; Joseph Leech; and Thomas Quinlan. I mention Chaplain Thomas Fagan. I mention Company Sergeant John Prendergast. I mention Company Quartermaster Sergeant Patrick Neville. I mention sergeants: Geoffrey Cuffe; Henry Dixon; Francis Gilsenan; Walter Hegarty; Patrick Joyce; Thomas Kelly; John Monaghan; Martin McCabe; Kevin McLoughlin; James Rea; and George Tiernan. I mention corporals: William Allen; Colm Brannigan; Patrick Burke; James Dempsey; John Devine; John Donnelly; Patrick Duffy; John Foley; John Foster; John Kerr; Brendan Laffere; Michael Lynch; John McAnaney; James McArdle; John McDonagh; Thomas McDonnell; John McEntee; John McManus; John O'Brien; Peter O'Callaghan; Michael O'Connor; Timothy Quinn; Patrick Rhatigan; Joseph Relihan; Christopher Roche; Michael Smith; Seán Tiernan; and Francis Williams. I mention privates: Gerard Battles; Francis Boland; Joseph Bracken; Robert Bradley; Michael Brennan; John Broderick; Michael Broderick; James Byrne; Patrick Conlon; Desmond Connolly; John Conway; Charles Cooley; Thomas Cunningham; Patrick Delaney; Albert Dell; Patrick Donnelly; John Dowler; Joseph Duff; William Duffy; Maurice Doyle; Patrick Dunleavy; Anthony Dykes; Michael Farrell; James Feery; Simon Finlass; Dominick Flaherty; John Flynn; John W Flynn; Thomas Flynn; Michael Galvin; Patrick Gildea; John Gorman; Edward Gormley; Noel Graham; Michael Greene; Thomas Gunn; William Hannigan; Dominick Harkin; James Harper; William Heffernan; Daniel Hegarty; Henry Hegarty; Joseph Hegarty; Gerald Hennely; Patrick Hogan; Thomas Hogan; William Hughes; William Keane; Robert Larkin; Thomas Larkin; Kieran Lynch; Edward Maher; Francis Malone; Joseph Maloney; Donal Manley; John Manning; James Myler; Daniel Molloy; Patrick Monaghan; James Murray; James McCourt; Michael McCormack; Michael McDermott; Thomas McDonagh; Matthew McGrath; Joseph McGuinness; Terence McMahan; Francis McManus; Anthony McNerney; John Nicell; James O'Kane; Joseph O'Kane; Robert Orr; Michael O'Sullivan; John Peppard; Christopher Powell; John Purtil; Matthew Quinlan; James Redmond; Daniel Regan; William Riggs; Anthony Roper; James Scally; Michael Seery; John Shanagher; John Stanford; Noel Stanley; Timothy Sullivan; Bernard Sweeney; Philip Sweeney; James Tahaney; Michael Tighe; Charles Tomkins; and Patrick Williams. Attached were: Commandant Joseph Clune; Lieutenant Kevin Knightly; Sergeant Colman Geary; Corporal Thomas O'Connor; Corporal James Lucey; Private James Kavanagh; Private John Dreelin; Private Michael Dunne; Private William Ready; Private Joseph O'Brien; Trooper Patrick McCarton; Trooper Michael Nolan; Trooper John Shanahan; helicopter pilot Eric Thors, interpreter Larse Froberg; and helicopter pilot Hovden Bjhrne.

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Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I hope many of the individuals and their families will gain solace and pride from having their names read out in Seanad Éireann in the way the Cathaoirleach has just done. It is a recognition of the stature in which they are held by the political system across all sides of the political divide in Ireland. I thank the Cathaoirleach for that.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the recognition of the Irish military service at Jadotville. As Members are aware, the siege of Jadotville occurred during the United Nations operation in Congo. This was the first peacekeeping mission in which significant numbers of Irish soldiers took part. A total of 6,000 Irish soldiers served in Congo from 1960 until 1964. I want to take this opportunity to recall the contribution of all who served in the various Irish contingents over the course of this long, difficult and complex mission.

I would like to particularly acknowledge at the outset that last Sunday, 8 November, marked the 60th anniversary of the Niemba ambush, where nine members of the Defence Forces were killed while serving with the UN operations in Congo. This was and still remains the largest single loss of life in any one incident in the history of the Defence Forces' participation in UN service. Two retired Defence Forces members who survived the Niemba ambush are still alive today. Due to the prevailing public health measures, it was not possible to hold a commemorative event to mark this tragic incident. The General Officer Commanding 2 Brigade, Brigadier General Tony Cudmore, laid a wreath at Cathal Brugha Barracks last weekend to remember those nine soldiers from the 33rd Infantry Battalion who lost their lives while on UN service during the Niemba ambush. Defence Forces veterans associations also mark this significant anniversary.

I will turn to the events at Jadotville in September 1961. The siege of Jadotville was a prominent event that occurred during Ireland's peacekeeping mission in Congo in September 1961 where A Company and 35th Infantry Battalion came under sustained attack. From 13 to 17 September, the men of A Company endured almost continuous attack. At the end of the siege, the men were taken into captivity until they were finally released on 25 October 1961. In 1962 and 1965, a constituted medals board considered the issue of award of medals, including nominations that had been submitted in respect of some of the men of A Company. This medals board did not award any medals the citation of which mentioned Jadotville. This decision was subsequently reviewed by the medals board and it was indicated that the issues raised had received due consideration, and that the board was not prepared to alter its findings.

In 2004 a broader examination of the events at Jadotville was conducted by military officers. This board recommended that the events at Jadotville and the contribution of the 35th Battalion be given recognition. The outcome of this broader examination of the events at Jadotville has led to a number of initiatives that honour the collective actions and bravery of the men of A Company at Jadotville and recognise the very significant contribution of A Company, and the 35th Infantry Battalion as a whole, to the UN peace support mission in Congo. Recognition of the courageous deeds and valiant actions of the members of A Companies over the years have included a presentation of scrolls to A Company in 2006. Portraits of Lieutenant Colonel McNamee, 35th Battalion commander, and Commandant Quinlan, company commander, A Company, were commissioned in 2006. In July 2010, the 50th anniversary of the first deployment to Congo was commemorated in a highly publicised and well-attended event at Case-ment Aerodrome in Baldonnell. A nominal roll of A Company, printed in copper, was affixed to the monument in Custume Barracks and was unveiled as part of the 50th anniversary of the Jadotville affair in September 2011. On the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the siege of

Jadotville, a unit citation to honour the collective actions and bravery of the men of A Company was issued. This unit citation was presented to the company in recognition of their collective heroism and professional performance during the siege of Jadotville when they were cut off from support and reinforcements. This was the first time a unit citation was awarded within the Defence Forces.

In June 2017, at the request of the then Minister of State with responsibility for defence, a further review of archival records relating to the siege of Jadotville was undertaken by the military authorities but this did not uncover any additional information that was not already known. The findings of this review clarified that there is no certainty available in archive records on the totality of A Company personnel recommended for awards. Furthermore, it revealed no evidence of the outcome of the award consideration process. Given the increase in knowledge and understanding of the unique and exceptional circumstances surrounding the siege of Jadotville, the then Taoiseach and the then Minister of State with responsibility for defence decided that the most appropriate decision would be to collectively honour the actions of A Company at Jadotville further. The Government committed, as an exceptional step, to award a medal known as An Bonn Jadotville, or the Jadotville Medal, to each member of A Company, 35th Infantry Battalion, and to the family representatives of deceased members. This specially commissioned medal gives full and due recognition in honour of the courageous actions of the men of A Company during the siege of Jadotville. The words inscribed on the medal are “Cosaint Chalma”, which means “valiant defence”, and “Misneach”, which means “courage”. These words were carefully chosen in order to pay tribute to the courageous actions of the men of A Company. Coupled with the unit citation that issued in 2016, no other collective award of this nature has been made to date and the uniqueness of such awards should not be understated.

In recent times, the issue of awarding military medals for gallantry, MMG, and distinguished service medals, DSM, to some, or all, of the soldiers of A Company has been raised in a number of forums. The personnel from A Company who were recommended to be considered for the award of the MMG or DSM underwent due process by a properly constituted medals board in 1962 and 1965. There is a well-established institutional process that takes place within a relatively short timeframe after events to assess the contemporaneous facts and findings.

The decision to award a MMG or DSM is one for the Minister for Defence under regulations. Such a decision is taken on foot of advice from a military board duly appointed by the Chief of Staff in accordance with Defence Forces regulations. This is the sensible and proper approach. As Minister, I rely on professional military advice in such matters, as I believe all politicians should. I do not intend to award MMGs or DSMs without the required evidence and appropriate recommendations coming from military sources. To do so would be anathema to military personnel generally. The sound and reasoned judgment that comes of senior military experience and a determination to get to the facts and bring forward a fair and balanced recommendation is what is required when it comes to the award of such medals.

The award of DSMs and MMGs are provided for in Defence Forces regulations, DFR A9. The criteria for the award of medals provides that the initial recommendation for the award of the medal to an individual may be made by an officer of the Defence Forces and shall be accompanied by a statement setting out the grounds for such recommendation and giving such other relevant information as will enable higher authority to determine the merits of the act or acts. The recommendation shall normally be based upon the statement of a person who has personal knowledge or was an eyewitness to the act or acts. The act or acts must be described specifically and in detail. If the initial recommendation is made by an officer who does not have

personal knowledge or was not an eyewitness to the act or acts, the testimony of at least one person who has personal knowledge or was an eyewitness to the act or acts, must accompany the recommendation. Where possible, the testimony of more than one such person shall be obtained. These are the regulations, which I know sound somewhat formal.

The introduction of any change to the regulations or to the criteria for the award of DSMs or MMGs is not a straightforward matter and has many associated complexities. For example, consideration must be given to any potential unintended consequences arising, such as maintaining the integrity of the award of medals system and implications for previous decisions of properly constituted military medals boards.

The availability of documentary evidence and official records presents a significant challenge in this case. It has been previously indicated that any additional documentation, information or evidence to support the request to award such medals will, of course, be considered. At this juncture, no new information has come to light that would be cause for the matter to be re-examined.

While I fully appreciate that the experiences in the Congo and at Jadotville were particularly distressing, it is also the case that many other members of the Defence Forces who have served overseas have been involved in serious and disturbing incidents where death and severe injury have resulted. This is in no way intended to denigrate the distress suffered and the courageous actions of those involved at Jadotville. Rather, it is to indicate that service in a war-torn region inevitably exposes members of the Defence Forces to the possibility of involvement in incidents of a very serious and distressing nature. This is what it means to be a peacekeeper and a soldier.

The Defence Forces have participated in overseas missions mandated by the UN since 1958. We can be justifiably very proud of the fact that they have completed approximately 70,000 individual tours of duty overseas in that time. In that time, a total of seven personnel have received the MMG while 90 personnel have been awarded the DSM for acts relating to service overseas.

The Defence Forces can only recommend the award of bravery and distinguished service medals in exceptional circumstances. Cases for the award of such medals are examined in great detail having regard to the circumstances pertaining in each particular case and on the basis of comparison with previous similar awards. There are awards made to all personnel who serve on overseas missions, which aim to recognise the contribution made by the members of each contingent serving on the peacekeeping mission and the difficult circumstances in which they have to operate. In this regard, the personnel referred to have received both a United Nations medal for their service in Congo, awarded by the UN, and the United Nations peacekeeping medal, awarded by the Irish Government. As I have outlined earlier, in 2017 the Government decided as an exceptional step to award a medal, known as An Bonn Jadotville or The Jadotville Medal, to each member of A Company 35th Infantry Battalion and to the family representatives of deceased members. This unique and specially commissioned medal gives full and due recognition in honour of the courageous actions of the men of A Company during the siege at Jadotville.

Notwithstanding all of the actions that have been undertaken to date, including the reviews and examinations of the events of Jadotville which I outlined earlier, the issue is receiving further consideration now by my office and by the Chief of Staff. I have asked the Chief of Staff

for his views, in writing and in person. The Chief of Staff has proposed the establishment of an independent group of external experts to consider the entire case and evidence, including new evidence, if any, that is available. My understanding is that on that board will be ex-military officers, a historian, and an academic who understands the context and what happened in some detail, so that we will have genuine and independent expertise examining the case, which many Members have raised politically in various forums and in some cases directly with me. This independent review group will report its findings and recommendations to the Chief of Staff, as it should, and the Chief of Staff will then make recommendations as appropriate to my office on the basis of that work and the recommendations that come from it.

I know there is huge emotion linked to the Jadotville case, and rightly so. This was something for us all, but in particular those linked to the Defence Forces, to be very proud of. The men who served there are responsible for extraordinary service to peacekeeping and to Ireland in what was an incredibly complex, challenging and difficult theatre of conflict. Governments, at different times and with different Ministers, have tried to recognise that in different ways. The conversation still continues in relation to Jadotville. That is why I have asked the Chief of Staff and he has responded to me in a constructive way in terms of a process that we believe is appropriate.

I do think we need to be careful, however. We cannot move to a situation where politicians decide who gets medals and what kind of medals they get in terms of service either at home or abroad. This has to be a recommendation that comes from the military themselves. That is how this works. Otherwise we move into the space of trying to please people politically as opposed to robust assessment through military structures, through a medals board in these cases, where assessments are made. That being said, my job as Minister for Defence, legally and as the head of the defence infrastructure for the country, is to make sure that the context is fully understood and, if new evidence arises or if new perspectives develop, that they are recognised and that appropriate reviews take place. That is the context in which we are looking at this review, which is not the first, but I believe the context of it is important.

I would like to take this opportunity to recall the contribution of all the men and women of the Defence Forces who have been deployed on missions in the cause of peace overseas. They are not only soldiers but also ambassadors, for Ireland, for what we stand for, and for our commitment to peace and peace management abroad. The continued participation in United Nations missions illustrates the very positive difference a small country like Ireland can make in many parts of the world which desperately need our intervention. I thank the Seanad for this opportunity to recognise the service overseas of so many Irish Defence Forces personnel, whether they be Air Corps, Naval Service or Army, which is the case for the vast majority. In particular, I thank the House for giving me an opportunity to give both the history and the perspective on Jadotville, which is certainly not a closed book. As soon as the Chief of Staff concludes the process that he has agreed to undertake, I will be more than happy to come back to the Seanad to talk about the recommendations and the decisions that can be made on the back of them.

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: It is fitting that we have this debate today on the 102nd anniversary of the end of the First World War and in commemoration of the 49,000 Irish soldiers who lost their lives during that war. Having the opportunity to address our war heroes who were at Jadotville is significant. On a personal level, I wish to mention Sergeant John Lynch who died in Lebanon in 1997. I was teaching his daughter, Christine, at the time, and I will never forget the loss, tragedy and trauma visited to Christine, her mum, and her little brother,

Scott. The military funeral in Newbridge in the church beside the school where I taught is something that will always be with me.

Coming from Kildare and living so close to the Curragh, the issues affecting the Defence Forces are very close to my heart. It is my contention that the veterans of the siege of Jadotville need to be properly recognised. I raised that two weeks ago here in the Seanad. The Minister mentioned that any awards that would be recommended must be seen as having been in exceptional circumstances. The siege of Jadotville was certainly exceptional and the bravery and courage shown by these men were absolutely exceptional.

The Minister talks about the complexities involved in the awarding of medals and the legal position which means he is unable to make awards of the military medal for gallantry other than on the recommendation of a military board appointed by the Chief of Staff. However, there are occasions when we need to find an alternative solution when a set of regulations appear to be unfair. I hope this is such an instance where we can honour the 29 veterans of Jadotville and still protect the integrity of the awards system. I welcome the fact that the Chief of Staff has proposed the establishment of an independent group of external experts to consider the entire case and evidence, and we await the findings of that.

In 2020 Ireland's peacekeepers are highly respected, having played a very significant role in Cyprus, East Timor, Lebanon and Chad. We have to remember that in 1961, this was one of our very first international military deployments. In 1958 a small number of observers had gone to Lebanon, and then in 1960, Irish troops were sent to the Congo as part of the UN force, ONUC. A total of 6,000 Irish men served in the Congo between 1960 and 1964. I recommend that Members read *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver, which gives a glimpse into the lives of those at the time. One of the largest ONUC engagements in which Irish troops were involved was the siege of Jadotville. The odds at the time were stacked against the Irish contingent. They were lightly armed and had only one truck, two jeeps and patchy radio communications when they were attacked by a larger force of almost 4,000 troops. The Irish commanding officer, Commandant Pat Quinlan, was an astute tactician, and his soldiers repeatedly repelled the attackers. It is a wonder that there were no Irish fatalities sustained given the nature of the onslaught that they endured. Facing insurmountable odds, A Company had to surrender eventually after exhausting their ammunition and supplies. They were held captive for five very difficult weeks until their eventual release and were home in Ireland in December 1961.

The return to Ireland was very difficult. Many of the returned soldiers felt it was better for their careers not to mention Jadotville. There was a sense of embarrassment about the surrender and about some poor decision-making by senior Army officials. According to Commandant Quinlan's son, Leo, five Irish soldiers who survived that siege subsequently took their own lives. It is a shame that so many of them were not alive to see the review of the battle and the awarding of various recognitions, such as the anniversary commemorations of the first deployment in Baldonnel in July 2010 or the unit citation given to A Company. The courage and tenacity shown by Irish forces at Jadotville are not in question. The 29 veterans who served with such bravery deserve to be honoured and I hope the Chief of Staff can find a solution to bring closure to this very lengthy campaign for the veterans, their families and, indeed, many in this House.

Our heroes deserve these awards but we also need to honour their memory and courage by improving the present day situation of our soldiers. Our Defence Forces' pay and conditions remain a huge unresolved issue and fighting for decent pay and conditions for all our Defence

Forces is a key objective for me and my party. The impact of poor pay and conditions on Defence Forces families has real and significant consequences in my constituency of Kildare South. I acknowledge the extra €32 million in budget 2021 but more needs to be done. Wives and Partners of the Defence Forces, WPDF, has stated that over the last nine years the Defence Forces have suffered from political neglect and institutional indifference. There are many issues that must be resolved. Last year's agreement on technical pay to increase military allowances has not been implemented. That is completely wrong. Along with our spokesperson on defence, Senator Wilson, I met with PDFORRA and the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers, RACO, recently and I fully support PDFORRA's desire to be an associate member of ICTU.

The need for troops to quarantine for four weeks for overseas deployment should mean they get extra pay. I ask the Minister to address that issue. Our Defence Forces are currently demoralised due to poor pay and conditions and we absolutely need to treat that as a priority. We also urgently need to improve living conditions in the Curragh and other barracks. The Army Ranger Wing's allowances have also not been implemented.

Senator Malcolm Byrne: I echo the views of my colleague, Senator O'Loughlin. The Minister will be aware that many local authorities have passed motions and supported this matter because of the interest shown in this House and the other House. I know the Minister is genuinely interested in this but what he is proposing is perhaps not the solution many of us would have sought. I urge the Minister to ask that that investigation begins as quickly as possible, bearing in mind that there are only eight men from that period still alive. While they are youthful in their enthusiasm it is important that the investigation takes place and that the Chief of Staff reports to the Minister as quickly as possible. I ask the Minister to indicate a timeframe for when he anticipates that report will come back.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I welcome the Minister to the House. This is the first time I have met him as Minister for Defence in this House so I congratulate him on his appointment. I also congratulate him on the fact that he has not appointed a Minister of State to work under him in the Department of Defence and has taken a hands-on position. He has met the representative bodies and visited a number of centres and units throughout the country. I am 100% behind him. I want to work with him and see him achieve the things he has told me he wants to achieve with the Defence Forces. Our Defence Forces are a proud group of people and all they need is the recognition that the Minister is working to get for them.

Since October 2016, I have called on the Government of the day to award medals to the Jadotville heroes on 28 separate occasions, the most recent being on the Order of Business a few weeks ago. The first time I raised the issue was in 2016, after the parade organised by ex-sergeant Paul Clarke at Collins Barracks, which was called Jadotville day and which has been held every year since. I came into this Chamber and said it was a sad reflection on the country that we did not do those heroes proud. We have not issued them with medals for the service they have given the country. Over the last four years I have travelled the length and breadth of the country and I have been honoured to meet surviving Jadotville veterans and the proud families of those who are sadly deceased.

However, my greatest sadness and remorse is that I served as a sergeant alongside three of the heroes of Jadotville in Dún Uí Mhaoilíosa i nGaillimh and never knew that they had served in Jadotville. I never heard word of Jadotville. I am talking about Corporal John Flynn, Private Charlie Cooley, who was nominated for the distinguished service medal, DSM, and Gunner

Bobby Orr, all of whom served in Galway. I want to say to these men, particularly because I trained recruits in Galway, that I am deeply sorry I did not know of their heroism and that I was not in a position to introduce recruits to them as the heroes they were. I acknowledge John Gorman in particular. He devoted most of his life to fighting for the recognition of his peers who served with him in Jadotville. If any man deserves recognition in this House today, it is John Gorman.

I have stood in the Chamber on a number of occasions and noted the passing of valiant members of A Company who went to their graves without the vindication and honour they deserved. I have met the families of those who took their own lives. Believe it or not, they returned from Jadotville as heroes. Most of them came from Galway and Athlone. They marched into Athlone as heroes and a very short time later they were regarded as cowards. I heard names being called out by the Cathaoirleach at the start of this debate. One that sticks in my mind is Geoffrey Cuffe. Geoff and I served in Athlone training potential non-commissioned officers, NCOs. He was a wonderful character in his time.

The people from Jadotville who were nominated for military medals for gallantry were: Company Sergeant John Prendergast; Sergeant John Monaghan; Sergeant Walter Hegarty, who is related to me through my niece; Corporal Timothy “Tadhg” Quinn; and Private Gerald Hennely. Those recommended for DSMs were: Captain William “Liam” Donnelly; Lieutenant Kevin Knightly; Lieutenant William Noel Carey, who is still with us; Lieutenant Tom Quinlan, Company Sergeant John Prendergast; Sergeant John Monaghan; Sergeant Walter Hegarty, who got a DSM at a later stage; Sergeant Tom Kelly; Corporal Frank Williams; Corporal James Rea; Corporal James Lucey; Corporal Tom McDonnell; Corporal John Foley; Corporal John McDonagh; Corporal John McManus; Corporal Tadhg Quinn; Corporal Michael Lynch; Private Joe O’Kane; Private Robert Larkin; Private Michael McCormack; Private Tom Gunn; Private Charles Cooley, who is watching this in Renmore today and who has a great character; Private Thomas Flynn; Private Michael Tighe; Private Daniel Molloy; Private John Nicell; Private Jim Feery; Private Noel Stanley; Private Michael Brennan; Private Gerard Hennely; Private Matt Quinlan; Private Michael Galvin; and Private Patrick McCarton. Those are recommendations. I fully support what the Minister is trying to do but this is a military matter, not a political matter. It is up to the military authorities to re-examine this case and make recommendations to the Minister. It is not for politicians to decide who gets medals in this world.

The late Colonel Pat Quinlan’s action is cited in military textbooks worldwide as the best example of the use of the so-called “perimeter defence”. The siege of Jadotville is internationally regarded as one of the most heroic battles in Irish military history and to this day is hailed as an example of bravery and military genius. Why is it that we cannot recognise our heroes? Why can Australia award a Victoria cross 75 years after an event and we cannot do similar? Again, it falls back to the military to look at this matter and make recommendations to the Minister. It is not for the Minister to demand medals for anybody.

I could go through the battle and the various waves that happened but there is no point in that. We have all heard of it before and there is no point in replaying that here today. A Company suffered no collateral damage. A few people were wounded but that was all. However, it inflicted massive damage on the enemy. Over the last four years I have had the unique privilege of working with John Gorman and Commandant Leo Quinlan, who is the son of Pat Quinlan. Indeed, I served under all of the Quinlans at one stage or another in my career. They are a fine military family. Colonel Pat Quinlan, or Commandant Quinlan at the time, was without doubt a leader second to none.

For a man from a military background where there was no experience of warfare and battle, his leadership at Jadotville was phenomenal and second to none.

I compliment the former Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, on the brave step he took in bringing about An Bonn Jadotville. It was a tremendous day for all of us. I thank the students of Galway Community College and Malahide Community School for their political lobbying on behalf of the veterans of Jadotville, and the history teachers in particular. We have heard
2 o'clock that eight veterans are still alive but that does not mean we can throw out the rule book and give those eight people medals. As my colleague, Senator Byrne, said, what we must do is expedite the research of the Chief of Staff into this issue, get a medals board together and see if we can make a recommendation. A recommendation is not a medal and that needs to be learned here. There needs to be an open and transparent appraisal of what took place at Jadotville, and then medals should be issued where they are due.

I say that because I am extremely proud of the people of whom I speak today. I am extremely proud of people like Charlie Cooley. I met him not so long ago sitting in a wheelchair. Those are all men in their 80s now. At the end of the day, we did some service for them by giving them An Bonn Jadotville but we need to go the extra step and clearly decide one way or the other on this issue.

Finally, I ask the Chief of Staff to include two further people in his deliberations. One is Pat Quinlan, who was never recommended for any medal whatsoever. He was, however, the leader on the day in Jadotville. The other person is John Gorman, who I believe, in the finest military tradition, has gone over and above the call of duty to ensure that his peers and colleagues were recognised for what happened at Jadotville. I am sorry for going over my time.

Senator John McGahon: I thank Senator O'Reilly, the Fine Gael spokesperson on defence, for allowing me to lead in this debate on behalf of our party. Before I get into the merits of this debate and why I believe we should have these medals awarded, I pay tribute to individuals, like Senator Craughwell and former Senator Gabrielle McFadden, who were lone voices in the wilderness for so long. They are now being joined by a chorus of voices, from all political parties and none, in both Houses of the Oireachtas. One need only search *kildarestreet.com* for "Jadotville" to find a flurry of parliamentary questions, Commencement matter debates and a mention on the Order of Business by Senator Wall last week. I refer to what so many of us here in the last month have said, let alone what individuals have been doing on both sides of the House.

I also want to highlight what I, as a new Member of this House, have found to be the most refreshing aspect of this debate. It is that there is no political one-upmanship from anyone here. No one is trying to get out in front of another individual. Nobody is trying to get credit, or anything like that. Everybody is very much on the same page and we are all sharing information with each other that we get back from representations. We are all talking to each other. I have picked up the phone to Senators Craughwell and Wall more times in recent weeks than ever before. It is important to state that we are all on the same page on this issue.

That brings me to the Minister, Deputy Coveney, who as a former Minister of Defence had been engaged on this issue previously, as was his office. I thank him for that because I know he is genuine and sincere, and we saw that in his remarks today. We can all agree that the Minister wants to see some kind of successful conclusion to this matter. I also pay tribute to Commandant Leo Quinlan, the son of Pat Quinlan. Without his determination in recent years,

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I fear that this issue would have fallen by the wayside. It could have fallen into the annals of time and been forgotten about. I have had the pleasure of speaking with Commandant Quinlan on several occasions this week to increase my own understanding of what is a complex issue. We might not be discussing these issues at all today if it was not for Commandant Quinlan.

The Jadotville action is the biggest military engagement the Irish Army has ever faced against a foreign enemy since the foundation of the State. It has been likened to the Battle of the Alamo in 1836 and to the battle of Rorke's Drift in 1879 during the Zulu Wars. Can we imagine that a battle in which 155 Irish troops engaged is in the same league, historically speaking, as the Battle of the Alamo? There were only 155 Irish troops, and they are seen as being on that level of military engagement in the history of military conflict globally.

That resulted from Commandant Pat Quinlan being a remarkable tactician and strategist, and it is because of his ability that this battle is right up there in the annals of military history. The fact that only five Irish troops were wounded during the five-day siege is a testament to Commandant Pat Quinlan and how he valued the lives of the troops under his command. As Senator Craughwell explained to me earlier, Commandant Quinlan ensured that a field of fire was placed on enemy targets, rather than putting Irish troops in positions where the threat of injury or death was dramatically increased. He kept his soldiers safe and looked after them, and that is why only five of them were wounded in a five-day siege against an enemy force numbering 3,500 strong.

I believe that there are historical reasons why medals were not awarded in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. I am not here today to dwell on those historical reasons; that is for others to decide upon and it is in the past. I am focusing on the present and what we can do to try to bring a measure of justice to this debate. I want to be clear, and Senator Craughwell was even clearer about this, that awarding medals is not in the personal gift of the Minister. It would be wrong if that was the case, because then we would be bringing politicians into military affairs. That would be wrong, and it would be wrong for anybody to suggest otherwise, although nobody has. It is easy for that point to get lost in the emotion of the debate. It is not the role of the Minister, and it is not in his gift or ability, to award military medals.

What we can do, and what I think is simple enough to do, is request the Chief of Staff of the Army to convene a medals board, as has already been outlined. We should let that medals board examine the whole issue again, in light of new information that I have no doubt will be supplied when the expert group meets. If it is decided that there is nothing to be decided here, which I do not think they will, then that is fair enough because we will have asked for that medals board to be reconvened to examine this issue in greater detail. I acknowledge there are technicalities involved and stumbling blocks concerning Defence Forces' regulations. If we must amend them slightly so that we can look at something like this case of Jadotville, then let us do that. I believe the Minister is genuine in his desire to resolve this issue and we saw that in his opening statement. Several Members will be aware of the work that has been done by the Minister's office in recent weeks on this issue. I will not say that was done to bring a successful conclusion, but to try to move the matter forward as much as possible. I cannot speak for other Members but I would like to think we are all grateful for that, especially when so many of us have been raising this issue in recent weeks, or years in the case of Senator Craughwell and others.

I am a firm believer that it is never too late to do the right thing, no matter what the issue is in life. It is never too late, whether something happened ten years ago, 20 years ago or, in this case, on the 60th anniversary, which will fall in early September. If we allow this debate

to continue and rumble on over the next year or two, we will end up in a situation where more of the surviving eight veterans will, sadly, have passed away. We will then look back at this moment and ask ourselves how foolish we were to not try and fix this issue now. There is no point trying to do that after these people have passed away by making awards posthumously. That is pointless.

When we think about it, it is amazing that these surviving men were just boys when they came under enemy fire in sub-Saharan Africa. There were only boys aged 15 or 16 years old. They survived, however, and they need to be recognised. I am thankful the Minister has come to the House with a clear outline of what he intends to do. He has not come here, paid us lip service and walked out. He came here with a clear and definitive plan concerning how he wants to make progress on this issue. My only request is for the Minister to set very clear time limits, of which every Member is aware, regarding when the expert group will report back to the Chief of Staff and when he will then report back to the Minister regarding any potential decisions. A clear timeframe would calm many of the fears among the military community and many Members of the Oireachtas.

Senator Mark Wall: I thank the Cathaoirleach and other Senators for listing the names of the members of A Company. It is always important to remember them and that was a poignant moment at the start of the debate. I welcome the Minister to the House. As others have noted, it is the first time he has joined us as Minister for Defence. I look forward to working with him as the Labour Party spokesperson on defence on the future of the Defence Forces. I thank Senators McGahon and Craughwell and others who noted that this issue has seen agreement across the House, which is very important. It is heartening to hear the support for these heroes throughout the House. It is important also to thank the Leader for allowing us time today to discuss this important matter.

The siege of Jadotville was, as has been described by the Minister's Department and again during the debate, a prominent event that occurred during Ireland's peacekeeping mission in the Congo in September 1961. A Company, 35th Infantry Battalion, took responsibility for the UN post at Jadotville on 3 September 1961. On 9 September, a large, hostile force of locals and international mercenaries surrounded them and began monitoring their every move. At 7.48 a.m. on 13 September, A Company came under attack from far superior numbers. From 13 to 17 September, they endured an almost continuous and sustained attack. They were taken into captivity on 17 September and remained there until finally being released on 25 October 1961.

In replies to my Labour Party colleagues over recent months, including most recently in September, the Department stated:

Over the past number of years various representations have been received in my Department outlining the courage and bravery of "A" Company. All representations have been considered and responded to acknowledging their valiant actions while under siege in Jadotville.

With regard to enquiries about any additional medals, it has been previously indicated that any additional documentation, information or evidence to support the request to award such medals will be considered. At this juncture, no new information has come to light.

It is my understanding that the documentation referred to exists and has been presented to the Department. This information explains why medals were not given at the time and why this

heroic episode in Irish military history was, effectively, swept under the carpet. I am informed the documentation goes on to outline that a recommendation was made by the commanding officer at Jadotville, Commandant Pat Quinlan, to award 28 distinguished service medals to those who served, and a distinguished service medal and a military medal for gallantry - our highest award for valour - to five more of the men of A Company after the siege. It is also my understanding that the UN is considering recognising the gallantry of these men, a timely reminder, as I am sure we can all agree, that our country must finally award the medals previously mentioned.

The Minister agrees we should all be very proud of these men; he stated as much here earlier today. The engagement in which the soldiers were involved at Jadotville is held up by many military armies and educators as a prime example of perimeter defence. It is taught and studied by many military colleges throughout the world, a lasting legacy to Commandant Quinlan and his men but also to the Defence Forces. Unfortunately, as we all know, it was not always like this. Many of these men were scorned and ridiculed on their return home following the engagement in the Congo. The term “Jadotville Jack” was used against these men and held against our Defence Forces by those who were simply uneducated about what the men of A Company had faced and achieved in defending their post for five days against a force more than 20 times the size of their unit. These men were, and have always been, proud standard-bearers of our State’s exceptional service to the UN as peacekeepers throughout the world. Their service, loyalty and bravery are, thankfully, now recognised by all those who have studied the engagement.

Over recent months, and since we returned to the Seanad Chamber, all political groups have referred to the bravery of Commandant Quinlan. During this time, there have been a number of campaigns promoting recognition of these men and, one hopes, ensuring that every Irish person will get to know of their bravery. One such campaign by the South East Military Veterans has, along with a large number of county councillors, co-ordinated a motion passing in support of this recognition in more than 18 local authorities, with more motions to come.

I am sure many Senators have spoken to and received correspondence from those who have recently watched the 2016 film “The Siege of Jadotville”, directed by Richie Smith and based on the book by Declan Power. The one aspect that is continually noted by people who have seen the film is the bravery of the young men, but just as important is the pride that people feel in the fact the men were Irish, representing this country and our Defence Forces. Like many Senators, I grew up watching war action films, which depict great armies with great victories or historic defences. This film showcases Irish heroes on an international stage, and pride is the overwhelming emotion felt by anybody who has seen the action depicted on the small screen.

Over recent months, I have spoken to many family members whose loved ones fought at Jadotville. They have lived their lives through stories of what happened over those five fateful days in September 1961 and the subsequent months. Inaccurate reports of mass Irish casualties, I am sure, haunted them in the early stories of the battle. Thankfully, all those involved in the siege survived and have all acknowledged their commanding officer, Commandant Quinlan, in achieving this. I have asked a number of them what it would mean to see their loved ones honoured in the way that Commandant Quinlan requested and they replied, variously: that it would mean everything to the person and their family and that all the hardship their dad went through would finally be recognised; that it would be a right finally done; and that it would be wishes finally carried out.

One hundred and fifty-five men were involved in this engagement on the Irish side. Those

men continued to serve their country in further engagements before they arrived home. It is incredible that these men came from throughout Ireland but quite remarkable that Assumption Road in Athlone provided 13 of these gallant soldiers. Some of the soldiers were just 16 years old and, unfortunately, this engagement had very sad consequences for their lives following their return home from the Congo. Only eight of the men are still alive but generations of Irish people are alive because of the historic defence of their position by Commandant Quinlan and his men. Often referred to as “Jadotville babies”, they have grown up with stories of their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers.

Unfortunately, they are waiting, as are we all, for the medals to be awarded. It is never too late to do the right thing. Next year will be the 60th anniversary of what has been described by many as one of the greatest events in Irish military history. It is important to acknowledge that a special medal was awarded in 2017 and that on the 55th anniversary, there was a unit citation. Nevertheless, the awarding of the distinguished service medals and the military medals for gallantry is, in my opinion but more importantly in that of relatives and loved ones of those who fought at Jadotville, the right thing to do. It would, as relatives have said, mean everything to them.

I welcome the fact the Chief of Staff will set up an independent group of external experts. That is the way to go. While I support the Minister’s comments that politicians should not award medals, I am sure he will agree that when we are brought information about incidents such as Jadotville and our heroes, we should bring it to his attention as the Minister for Defence in order that we can go through the due process of awarding those medals.

Senator Vincent P. Martin: I welcome the Minister to the House. His presence is a sign of how seriously this matter is being taken. It is a good day for the Upper House, Seanad Éireann, that we can come up with an initiative such as this, ventilate our views and have such a constructive, positive debate, shining a light on this in a way that might not always be open to the Lower House. It is fitting that we acknowledge the courageous efforts of A Company, 35th Infantry Battalion, and it is only right that the House acknowledges the valiant defence of Jadotville in September 1961. I am sure my colleagues in the House will also join me in thanking them but also the thousands of members of the Defence Forces and the Garda Síochána who have served this country and the United Nations with honour since 1958. During this debate, I think especially of those Defence Forces personnel and their Garda colleagues, who also have seen service abroad, who have died overseas in the cause of international peace and security. We should not let the debate pass without remembering the members of An Garda Síochána and Óglaigh na hÉireann who have given their lives at home for the people to have a safer place.

This week also marks the 60th anniversary of a tragic incident, referred to by the Minister, involving the men of another A Company. On 8 November 1960, an 11-man patrol from A Company of the 33rd Infantry Battalion departed its base at Niemba under the command of Lieutenant Kevin Gleeson. Unfortunately, Lieutenant Gleeson and eight brave souls never came home. They perished after being attacked without warning by a large number of Baluba tribesmen. These deaths were the first operational casualties suffered by the Defence Forces since the Civil War and make up the highest death toll from a single action suffered by the Defence Forces in the cause of world peace. That ambush brought home immediately to this country the harsh realities and challenges facing our peacekeepers when we choose to send them abroad. In total, 26 members of the Defence Forces would die while serving in the Congo.

I mention the Niemba ambush during today’s discussion because I would like to acknowl-

edge that the actions of Jadotville were neither the first nor the last episodes of exceptional bravery and gallantry by our soldiers, sailors and air crew. They are, however, a very important exemplar of the fine traditions of loyal, selfless service we have come to associate with Óglaigh na hÉireann. While the siege of Jadotville and the sustained assaults they suffered from air and the ground are widely known and, as Senator Wall noted, documented in “The Siege of Jadotville” movie on Netflix, it is often forgotten that these men not only faced the horrors of the battlefield for those five heated days, they also endured more than a month of gruelling captivity, a captivity they could not be sure they would come through alive, and after being released faced another military engagement prior to returning home.

Many more served again in the Congo, Cyprus, on the Border of the island of Ireland and, of course, in Lebanon. These men are the personification of the finest ideals of our foreign policy and the national spirit. It is due to their actions and the actions of their colleagues that this country is held in the highest esteem around the globe, particularly in the UN General Assembly. As we take our seat on the UN Security Council in 2021, let us remember that the blood, sweat and tears of our Jadotville veterans and many others form the tangible bedrock of our continued commitment to the founding ideals of the UN. During their service and in their retirement, these men have demonstrated their commitment to the Defence Forces’ values of respect, loyalty, selflessness and physical and moral courage, and it is time that we in this House gave them the respect and loyalty they are due by supporting this motion.

To paraphrase Leo Quinlan, son of Commandant Pat Quinlan, speaking in 2019 on the tragic legacy of Jadotville, he said that every battle has to be fought twice, first on the field and second with historians. I think we can all agree that a third unfortunate battle between the State and the survivors needs to end with the recognition that these men deserve. I welcome what the Minister of Defence said today and call on him to do all in his power to ensure that the medal recommendations made by Colonel Pat Quinlan - he was a commandant at the time but retired a colonel and has now passed away - are reviewed by a competent military board, which I am sure this external expert board will do. While I am aware that the military board sat in 1965 and considered some of Colonel Quinlan’s recommendations, we must acknowledge that official attitudes, culture and biases at the time may have significantly hampered the work of that board.

As Senator McGahon said, many of these soldiers were mere teenagers, but regardless of their age, all of their lives were changed irreparably by their service in the Congo. In addition to the physical scars, many of these men brought home a significant number of unseen scars for the remainder of their lives. These traumas were undoubtedly exacerbated by the lack of recognition of their deeds at the time and their shameful abandonment in retirement. Men may not have died on the battlefields of Katanga that week, but let us be under no illusion that men changed irreparably and for the worse as a result of that siege. Lacking proper recognition during service and care and support during retirement, many of these heroes turned to alcohol, which is documented in published reports, while others tragically ended up taking their own lives according to a piece published in *The Irish Times*. This is what we are dealing with here. They were changed forever through serving for peace.

Military medals are highly valued and regarded as representing all that is best in the field of human endeavour. Medals in themselves cannot be a starting point or finishing line when it comes to the State engaging with its faithful servants. All members of the Defence Forces swear an oath of fidelity to Ireland and loyalty to the Constitution. They commit to serving the State and the cause of international peace and security at any time or place in the world. They take on the responsibility willingly and this commitment cannot be one sided. This places a

reciprocal onus on us to support them. In putting the needs of the nation, the Defence Forces and others before their own, they expect to be treated fairly by the State and the support of society and all of Government. I, along with two of my colleagues here from south Kildare, am a public representative from Kildare, which has such a fine military tradition. It is not just about Kildare; this is an Irish issue. It is felt so strongly in Kildare. In Waterford, Councillor Jody Power from the Green Party tabled a motion to support and promote recognition. I know many other county councils would join with us. I welcome the fact that the Minister is advancing matters today. Of course, there are boundaries. There is only so much the Minister can do but he has done as much as he can on this occasion. We really look forward to this being moved on swiftly.

Senator Lynn Boylan: I welcome the Minister. I add Sinn Féin's voice to this motion to recognise the sacrifices of the soldiers at the siege of Jadotville. September 2021 marks 60 years since one of the most remarkable and some would say miraculous sieges in military history. During what was known as the Congo crisis of 1960 to 1963, a contingent of 155 Irish UN troops, designated A Company, commanded by Commandant Pat Quinlan were sent to the mining town of Jadotville, now known as Likasi, ostensibly to assist in the protection of its citizens following a request by the Belgian ambassador to the UN. A Company found itself in hostile territory from the beginning, with the locals distrustful to the point of resentment of the UN presence.

At 7.40 on the morning of Wednesday, 13 September 1961, the Katangese attacked while many of the Irish UN troops were attending an open air mass. Expecting to take the men off guard, the first attackers moved in rapidly but were spotted by an Irish sentry and a warning shot by Private Billy Reidy alerted the company to the threat. Reidy was wounded in a later exchange. The attackers had a strength of 3,000 to 5,000 men, mostly Katangese and settlers but with many Belgian, French and Rhodesian mercenaries, armed with a mix of light and heavy armament and with air support. For the most part, the Irish UN soldiers were armed with only light personal weapons, a small number of machine guns and mortars. A Company, 35th Battalion suffered five wounded in action with no fatalities during the siege. The Katangese, on the other hand, suffered heavy losses. Up to 300 were killed, including 30 mercenaries, and an indeterminate number were wounded with figures ranging to from 300 to 1,000.

In the end, with his position untenable, without any clear orders or promise of assistance, having run out of ammunition and food and running low on water, Commandant Quinlan accepted the second offer to surrender to the Katangese on the afternoon of Sunday, 17 September 1961. Those Irish soldiers were then held as prisoners of war for approximately one month while the Katangese negotiated terms of release that would inflict the greatest embarrassment on the UN.

Although A Company 35th Battalion had tactically defeated a larger enemy at Jadotville, the Irish Defence Forces leadership did not overtly acknowledge the battle. There may have been perceived shame that A Company had surrendered or because of political and strategic errors at higher levels. It is important to put into the record what happened over those days. Since the incident no Irish soldier has received any decoration for his actions at Jadotville even though Commandant Quinlan recommended 33 of his men for the military medal for gallantry.

In 2004, the then Minister for Defence, Deputy O'Dea, agreed to hold a full review of the battle. A Defence Forces inquiry cleared Commandant Quinlan and A Company of an allegation of soldierly misconduct. Commandant Pat Quinlan, whose actions are cited in military

textbooks worldwide as the best use of perimeter defence and who died in 1997, only had his public reputation restored nine years after his death. In 2005 a commemorative stone recognising the soldiers of A Company was erected on the grounds of Custume Barracks in Athlone, the barracks from which A Company departed for its mission. A commissioned portrait of Commandant Quinlan was installed in the Congo room of the Irish Defence Forces UN school. In October 2017, a plaque commemorating Commandant Quinlan was unveiled in his native County Kerry by the former Taoiseach, Enda Kenny. They were presented with special medals, An Bonn Jadotville, at a special ceremony.

The Minister for Defence, Deputy Coveney, said the matter of bravery medals was considered by a properly constituted medals board in 1965 and that no awards were made for Jadotville. The decision was approved by the then Chief of Staff. A later Chief of Staff ordered a review of the decision and it was upheld. The Minister said that both medals are time bound - two years in the case of the military medal of gallantry and four years for the distinguished service medal.

I believe that all the honours that have been bestowed on the members of A Company show that there is an appetite among the public and across the political divide to recognise appropriately the sacrifice made. I add Sinn Féin's voice to today's motion. We are legislators and nobody is suggesting that politicians should be awarding military medals, but we need to fix this before the men pass on. It is in our gift to do that as legislators. This House speaks with one voice in saying to the Minister that while we recognise the complications, it should not mean that we will not try to fix it.

Senator Frances Black: I welcome the Minister to the House. Members of the Civil Engagement Group wholeheartedly support this motion to recognise the gallantry of the soldiers of A Company who fought bravely and professionally in the siege of Jadotville in 1961. It is paramount that after 59 years we finally recognise and honour the bravery, professionalism and gallantry of the 155 Irish soldiers who fought and defended themselves during this failed peacekeeping mission in Katanga. I cannot begin to imagine the fear and terror experienced by those young men when they had to fight for their lives for five days straight. These men were as young as 15 years old having to fight to survive against 4,000 soldiers until they had no choice but to call for a ceasefire when they ran out of water. We are all family members, and as a mother, I shudder to think of the poor families suffering at home knowing that once the siege had finished, their sons, brothers and husbands were held captive in prisoner of war camps for six weeks. The soldiers were at the mercy of others until the UN could finally negotiate their release.

It is a story of profound trauma that nobody should ever have to experience. I cannot begin to imagine the panic and hopelessness that they must have felt at the time. It is essential that we not only recognise their struggle today but also recognise the masterful skills of Commandant Pat Quinlan, under whom the men of A Company fought valiantly. He has since been referred to as a masterful tactician. His foresight allowed them to prepare defences and dig trenches for an anticipatory attack that would ultimately ensure the survival of all 155 peacekeepers.

It is high time that they be awarded distinguished service medals. The siege of Jadotville is a major part of Irish history and we must treat it and remember it as such. More has been done in recent years to honour and remember the heroes, but these medals would signify a deep mark of respect and gratitude with the highest of Irish military awards and decorations. I believe with every fibre of my being that these heroes are more than deserving of such an accolade.

Noel Carey was only 24 years old and he remembered thinking to himself on 13 September as the battle broke out, “As the shells and bullets rained down on us, I just thought ... we were supposed to be peacekeepers, now we’re all going to get killed.” The men spent the following six weeks in captivity where Irish men as young as 15 were held in camps until the United Nations negotiated their release.

Perhaps the most painful part of this history is how the men of A Company were treated when they returned to Ireland. They were publicly condemned and referred to as cowards for calling for a ceasefire. They were viewed as weak by the press and media. Their bravery, masterful tactics and gallantry were all forgotten and pasted over with shame. For that I feel deep regret. The most heartbreaking part of the story is that from the group of 155 soldiers, five of them took their own lives after the trauma they had experienced and the public condemnation. This shows me that we failed them. These men could not get the help they needed in a mental health crisis. The trauma they carried was too heavy to live with. We failed them. We cannot fail them again. This deeply upsetting and unfair part of our history needs to be remembered, as does their pain and suffering. We simply cannot allow these heroes to be forgotten.

I am very glad to hear that this issue is receiving further consideration. I am sure we would all agree that it would be great to see these men receive the distinguished service medals and military medals for gallantry, which would show a sincere mark of respect and gratitude to the men of A Company and acknowledge the siege of Jadotville as a cherished part of our Irish history.

Senator Lisa Chambers: I propose that we extend time to facilitate the remaining five Senators who wish to speak, with one minute each.

An Cathaoirleach: Under the order of the House, the Minister is to reply by 2.39 p.m. and we are supposed to finish at 2.45 p.m.. However, I want everybody to get in. Everybody will get to speak, but it is one minute each. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Senator Lisa Chambers: I welcome the Minister’s saying that a review board is to be set up. I commend Vice Admiral Mark Mellett on his flexibility in this regard. I agree with the Minister’s position that it is not for politicians to award medals; it is for the military to do so. I think there is something special about the siege of Jadotville. That is why it has exercised us for so many years and why there is such emotion in this House and beyond. Former military personnel have spoken in this House from personal experience. Something makes this different from other instances. I take the Minister’s point on board.

I wish to make a wider point while the Minister is present. We have a strange relationship with our Defence Forces. We do not do enough to acknowledge the Defence Forces’ role and their special place within our society. We need to do more on promoting the Defence Forces. The loss of so many members of the Reserve Defence Force is particularly regrettable because they were the personal connection in each town and village in Ireland with the Defence Forces and with the uniform. That link has been broken and is gone. Work on promoting our Defence Forces more broadly would be very welcome.

Senator Aidan Davitt: I welcome the Minister here today. I certainly welcome the promised review. It is imperative that the committee is given a free path to make its own findings and recommendations. As the Minister mentioned, the composition of the committee is most important.

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As the Minister stated, two reviews were held in 1962 and 1965. In the fullness of time the narrative and perspective can change.

I commend several local authorities, including my own one, Westmeath County Council, under the stewardship of the cathaoirleach, Ken Glynn. I know Joe Carroll in Cork, and several different local authorities had this on their agenda, which helped to speed this up. The A Company leader, Commandant Quinlan, had recommended that 27 of his men be awarded distinguished service medals and five received the military medal of gallantry.

Tom Gunn from Mullingar served in Jadotville. I recommend that all the serving members are interviewed as part of this process.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: I welcome the Minister and I acknowledge his real engagement on this matter. Given the shortness of the available time I will quote Commandant Quinlan, who ruefully stated that if one had men killed, it may be seen as victory, but if one saves those men in a good defence, it is a defeat. There is context in that interpretation. I welcome that the commission has been set up and I hope it reports quickly. I also hope it looks into the historical context, the culture of the time and the direction the men were sent, including whether they should have been sent to Jadotville in the first place. It is a questionable proposition. Therein may lie the fault and a kind of historical cover-up. They should not have been directed there.

I welcome the commission and we should be very proud of our Defence Forces. We should be retrospectively proud of these men and the survivors, and they deserve recognition. I am impressed by the real engagement with it now and if a proper historical analysis is taken, the case would stand for recognition of these men.

Senator Micheál Carrigy: I welcome the Minister and compliment the Cathaoirleach on reading the roll of names into the record of the House. I fully support the campaign by the former members of the Defence Forces, and particularly Senators Craughwell, Wall and McGa-hon, who put this matter on the agenda.

I spoke this morning to a survivor who lives in my native parish, Private John Dowler, or Seán as he is known to me, about this. He said they were treated like lepers and they were told not to speak about it. In 2017, the Government decided, as an exceptional step, to award a medal to each member of the battalion to recognise their courageous actions. The ceremony took place in Athlone, which is considered the home of the company, and that was correct. It was the first step taken by the State in recognising these men.

I welcome that the Chief of Staff is currently considering the matter in the context of awarding medals. An independent medals board has been set up to consider the case. I agree with a number of comments here that it is up to the military to decide the matter of who is to receive medals and not politicians. We need to right a wrong. It is as simple as that.

Senator Aisling Dolan: I welcome the Minister here today. We must recognise the heroic nature of this unit and Commandant Pat Quinlan, who kept his team alive. We have the barracks in Athlone and many families in Roscommon and Galway have served with distinction in the Army. We have generations of families whose lives are intertwined with the Defence Forces. As Senators, including Senator Carrigy, have mentioned, the An Bonn Jadotville medal was awarded at a special ceremony in Athlone and it is considered the spiritual home of A Company.

The importance of the peacekeeping role of Irish soldiers since 1955 is a key reason Ireland

has been so successful in winning the observer role we now have in the UN. The Army, in helping healthcare services through this Covid-19 pandemic, is again proving crucial in how it has come to help our country in a time of need.

What is the timeline for the independent group to give recommendations, particularly for the eight living heroes and veterans of A Company? It is time, as a country, for us to look at the definition and qualities of leadership. What do we consider as leadership? I acknowledge the bravery and honour of the soldiers who endured shame when they returned to Ireland. Will the Government consider Commandant Quinlan's recommendation of the 30 members for medals? For the soldiers of Ireland and their families, it is time to recognise the bravery of A Company in Jadotville and our failure in the 1960s to the veterans of this battle.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank the Minister for his time and allowing all Members to contribute on the debate.

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I thank the Cathaoirleach. This has been a really useful debate and I hope the families watching get some solace from the fact that the Seanad has decided to prioritise this debate, spend this much time discussing the matter and that the debate had so many contributors, which is not always the case. I congratulate the Senators who have made this happen through the Cathaoirleach's actions, and they include Senators Craughwell, McGahon, Wall and others, who have taken a real personal interest in the matter.

Senators have asked me for timelines and my commitment is that we want the review to be concluded, with a recommendation to me from the Chief of Staff by the end of next March. It is important we give some time for this but not too much time, as many people will be waiting. The end of March is a reasonable timeline. It gives the review group a number of months to produce a report for the Chief of Staff upon which we can make informed decisions.

I have not announced a medal review board today. The Chief of Staff has committed to putting in place an independent review group that is external, so it does not comprise serving personnel *per se*. That will result in an independent and open-minded review. It is a matter for the Chief of Staff to appoint people but we will certainly make sure it is a credible review group that will produce a report that can allow us to make decisions I hope will be welcomed by this House.

I recognise how responsible this debate has been in the context of the politics of this matter. It is important that it is recognised here and in other fora how medals are awarded and how people are recommended for those awards. When someone commits a career to the Defence Forces, medals really matter, along with the recognition that comes with them, the precedent set and how they compare with others who have also been honoured with medals. We need to get this right and this must happen on the basis of a military assessment.

What politicians can do, and what I will do as Minister for Defence, is ensure we put the political context in place for this review. It must be done in an open-minded way that takes account of history and attitudes of the time and today. The recognition of courage, skill and the extraordinary contribution and sacrifice made by those involved at the time should get the review it deserves and we should be able to move on and make decisions on the back of it. If I need to change regulations to facilitate it, we will do that. There shall be no process barriers in place.

There must, however, be integrity in a medal system and the ownership of that must stay

within the military and medals boards to assess these issues. We should not forget that the majority of people who get nominated for consideration for medals do not get awarded those medals. Medal assessment boards are a tough process and Senator Craughwell and others who have served in the Defence Forces know this. Many people get nominated and it is an honour to be nominated but getting awarded a medal is a big deal. It should always be a big deal because of the recognition it represents. I hope we can progress the matter. As I have said, I would be more than happy to return to the Seanad at the end of March or the start of April when we have a review completed for the Chief of Staff. On the back of that he can make recommendations to me and I assure Members we will act on those quickly if a political process is required to facilitate the recommendations.

Disability Day Services: Statements

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): I thank the Senators for raising this issue in the House today. I am glad to have the opportunity to restate this Government's commitment to supporting people with disabilities and their families.

I will begin by acknowledging the significant impact Covid-19 has had, and continues to have, on people's lives. I have visited a number of day services since taking office and have heard at first hand just how difficult the past eight months have been as we have dealt with the consequences of the pandemic and the current restrictions. Covid-19 has presented an unprecedented challenge to our disability services, and most particularly to our day services, which are essential to a great many people. While we all want our services to return to pre-Covid levels, the collective aim of the Department of Health, the HSE and service providers has to be to restore services in a safe way. Today, I would like to update Senators on the significant work that is under way to achieve this within day services.

The HSE provides and funds a range of day services and rehabilitative training to approximately 19,000 adults with disabilities in almost 1,000 locations across the country. These services are essential for the adults with disabilities who avail of them and for their families.

I would like to describe to the House what day services looked like before Covid-19. The HSE and service providers have been working for a number of years to implement a reform programme called New Directions. The aim of the New Directions policy is to ensure that day services are focused on giving people the supports they need to live the life they choose and to use mainstream services in their community. The core values of person-centredness, community inclusion, active citizenship and quality underpin the provision of day services. In practice, this means that, depending on a person's wishes and preferences, he or she may only spend a small part of his or her day at a day service location. People in day services are supported to discover their interests, which could include things like training courses, sport and leisure activities, or the simple act of meeting friends for lunch in the community. New Directions aims to embed people in day services in their communities.

As the House is aware, as part of the overall national effort to contain the spread of Covid-19, and in line with public health advice, disability day services locations that closed in March have now reopened, although not at the level at which they operated pre-Covid. The HSE began planning for the resumption of adult disability day services in May. A group rep-

representative of families, service providers and other relevant stakeholders, including Inclusion Ireland, was convened and tasked with the development of a resumption plan.

On May 31, the framework for the resumption of adult disability day services was published and the guidance to support this framework was published on 8 July. The guidance was developed with the aim of enabling the provision of safe and person-centred disability day service supports, which are in line with current public health advice and infection control guidance. It is not overly prescriptive in terms of detail as there is a wide diversity of disability among the 19,000 adults who receive day service supports and as day service locations vary enormously in size and capacity. Of this 19,000, approximately 5,000 people receive a day service as part of their residential placement.

While I would like to fully reopen services to pre-Covid levels, we have to be mindful of public health advice and protecting service users and staff. We should be thankful that the spread of Covid-19 in disability day services has been relatively low compared with other sectors. Unfortunately, there have been 14 deaths associated with disability day services, which is 14 deaths too many. I pass on my condolences to the families who have had to say goodbye to loved ones. We must ensure that the spread of the virus is kept low. The stepped approach to building the services back up allows us to do this. I genuinely do know that this is not ideal and that it is a hard balance to strike.

In July, I tasked the HSE with setting up a portal on its website detailing when each service would open and the level of service it would be providing. This allowed people to see what level of service providers would be able to offer as a baseline. It was just a baseline to see what could be done to just open the doors after coming through Covid.

Day services reopened at approximately 38% capacity throughout August and early September and school leavers who require a day service were also introduced to their new services during this period. The guidance developed to support the resumption of adult day services has had to take account of social distancing rules, meaning that there are a reduced number of people in each service location. Ongoing challenges include the physical limitations of the buildings available, the lack of mainstream community activities, and the continued restrictions imposed by social distancing guidance.

Social distancing is only one factor in the reduction of capacity in services. As I have said, day services have been developed in line with *New Directions*, which advocates that, where possible, supports to people should be provided in the wider community. For example, a day service hub may have 50 adults in attendance but there may be only 25 people in the building at any one time. The infrastructure is therefore developed to accommodate 25 adults in the building at any time. With social distancing, this may result in a situation where perhaps 12 to 15 people can now be in the building at any one time. Attendance at gyms, swimming pools and other community settings is, of course, subject to restrictions based on public health guidance. This means the capacity of these locations to accommodate day services users is also reduced. All locations are different in size and serve adults with different needs, so there will be differences in the amount of community-based supports that people can now get during the Covid pandemic. This has also contributed to the reduced service capacity we now see, about which Senators are now getting representations and about which they are talking to very frustrated parents.

The HSE is, however, committed to maximising the support that can be provided within

these restrictions and a number of innovations have been developed to augment traditional service provision, such as online and in-home support. When we talk about day services, we are talking about in-service support and the outreach model. This outreach model was developed during the lockdown to allow the most vulnerable and their families to be supported.

They have continued to be supported and enhanced since the reopening of day services. The HSE is also constantly monitoring the relevant public health guidance, and other developments in this regard may increase day service capacity in the future. As the guidance changes, service levels will evolve accordingly.

I understand the frustration of day service users and their families because services have not resumed to pre-Covid levels. My office has been inundated with queries about adult day services and the main question people ask me is when day services will increase. This is a complex question to answer. However, finding a solution has been my absolute priority since taking office.

The programme for Government makes extensive commitments to improve the lives of people with disabilities. I can assure the House that this is always to the fore. In July, the Government reversed the 1% cut to the sector which was worth approximately €20 million. In September I allocated €10 million for the reopening of services and increasing services by one day for users. That came on the back of the portal where we knew exactly what was required for services to open at a baseline. We built in the one day and that was provided for in the budget to the tune of €100 million.

The amount involved was not just € 7.5 million. Buying an extra day of services costs €30 million over a full year. Service users who got two days should now be getting three days and those who got three days should now be getting four. The objective at all stages is to return us to, at minimum, 50% capacity.

Another €7.8 million was provided to tackle the assessment of needs backlog. This totalled an investment in disabilities of €37.8 million before the budget was announced. I could not talk about that figure before budget day for fear that it would undermine what I got in the budget. What I secured before budget day was €5 million above what was allocated in the previous year's funding. This is a clear demonstration of the Government's commitment to the disability sector and a tangible example of my commitment to fighting for people with disabilities during my time in office.

Budget 2021 was announced last month. Significant money was secured to start delivering on the programme for Government commitments. I secured an additional €100 million for new initiatives in 2021, bringing the total disabilities budget to an unprecedented level of around €2.22 billion.

Regarding day services specifically, the additional investment will continue to build the capacity of our adult disability services and increase day services by one day a week. It will also support around 1,700 young school leavers who are part of training programmes in 2021.

I would also like to note that, in line with the Government's resilience and recovery framework for 2021, the provision of disability services is regarded as an essential service. This is the same as schools and crèches, and it is our intention that day services will remain open at each level of the resilience and recovery framework, subject to public health guidance. While I have spoken about day services today, we are still working to ensure that we can deal with

respite and overnight care.

When I took up this office over the summer disability day services were closed. I am pleased to see the fruits of the intensive work between the Department, HSE, service providers and co-operation with parents. Day services have now been opened and are seen as an essential service.

Senator Mary Seery Kearney: I thank the Minister of State. As she knows, I am very enthusiastic about her plans and budget. It is ambitious and the programme for Government is excellent in respect of disability services. I commend the Minister of State on how she has conducted business in the Department and her responsibilities thus far.

I want to begin by acknowledging the enormous difficulties experienced by people with disabilities and their families during the pandemic. Diminished access throughout the pandemic has caused significant hardship and has undermined progress in supports and developments. The requirement for isolating meant that people with disabilities and their families were isolated in order to keep their loved ones safe.

I support a number of organisations. One has particular significance for me, and I mentioned it to the Minister of State last week. I refer to WALK in Drimnagh, which embodies everything that one would want in a disability service in terms of the empowerment of people with disabilities and bringing community to people with disabilities and people with disabilities to the community. It runs two events each year, which sadly are not happening this year, at Hallowe'en and Christmas which are fantastic. Children, including my own child, look forward to them each year. The service is run by people with disabilities. It is fantastic. It is a shared space and community.

WALK is a section 39 organisation. I want to talk to the Minister of State about the difference in staffing remuneration between section 38 and 39 organisations. In order to survive the winter surge in Covid and continue to keep its day services open, WALK is desperately trying to attract, motivate and retain its front-line workers. Its employees are ordinary people who are also trying to combat coronavirus. They work long shifts day in, day out. They sacrifice time with their families and friends and put themselves and their families at risk of contracting the virus.

This is happening within the context of mental and emotional fears that society in general has about Covid. Section 39 organisations are community and voluntary not-for-profit organisations. They have legal service agreements with HSE. Apparently funding across the sector totals €3 billion and more than 3,000 agencies administer these types of contracts. However, there is a distributive injustice in the salary between section 39 and section 38 workers.

In 2008, in response to the crash this particular category of workers were categorised as public servants for the purposes of cutting salaries. However, now they are not but section 38 organisations are and, as a consequence, staff in them have had six increments since 2018 whereas those employed in section 39 organisations have not had any. An organisation like WALK which is trying to retain and attract staff is in competition with section 39 organisations because of pensions and remuneration issues. On top of that, it is less stressful to work in a supermarket for what is probably better remuneration.

The disparity has a consequence in that staff in an organisation like WALK have been invested in and trained and are highly qualified. Yet, they can leave for jobs that are better remuneration.

nerated with less responsibility and stress. The direct consequence is the ability of services like that to deliver their disability day services. While organisations are getting better at working online, which has been a new aspect of the pandemic that has been very good, for intellectual disabilities nothing beats an in-person service. I know the Minister of State knows that. It is necessary for individuals and their families to be able to cope.

The service has seen a significant increase in mental health issues. Now more than ever it needs staff who are highly experienced. Unfortunately, given the pay disparity it has to employ and engage people who are no doubt equally qualified but are less experienced. Pay disparity affects recruitment, in particular now when we need experienced people working in voluntary and community sectors. I urge the Minister of State to review it and do whatever she can to change it as it would make a really significant difference to these very valuable community organisations.

Senator Sharon Keogan: I welcome the Minister of State to the House and congratulate her on her elevation. I am sure she will do this sector proud. I will begin by acknowledging the sterling work of parents and carers of people with disabilities. It truly is a labour of love and devotion. To contribute to the life of someone with special needs and to help them to achieve at least some of their potential is a thing of beauty. It is also invaluable to the individuals themselves, their communities and the State.

In my own county of Meath, the day care centre, An Castan, in Navan provides services to 24 adults but these services have not been restored since March. This is unacceptable. Many of the parents of these adults are in their late 70s and 80s. If the Minister of State could do something in regard to that particular centre, I would really appreciate it. No suitable alternative day services have been offered and very often these adults are being looked after at home by their elderly parents. This is putting immense pressure and strain on these parents. They need assistance and respite. They are close to burnout and many parents across the country in similar circumstances are feeling the same way. These parents have done our State a great service and made huge sacrifices in order to continue to care for their sons and daughters in a loving family setting. The State cannot abandon these families.

I have read reports in the media regarding the redeployment of senior HSE therapists to work as Covid-19 testers and contact tracers. This is a real concern in light of growing waiting lists and cancelled clinics. Staff involved include speech and language therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists who would have been working in primary care and disability services. Some of them have been redeployed for a second time since the pandemic began and fear that their redeployment is long term. They have written to HSE management expressing concern and have said that their professions and disciplines are being undervalued. Therapists have spoken in the media about the detrimental impact on both adults and children of the cessation of, or reduction in, services. They have warned that preventing access to services could adversely affect the development of children with disabilities in particular. As with the adult services, years have been lost.

Approximately 19,000 adults with disabilities receive day service supports and of these 5,000 receive a day service as part of a residential placement. Due to Covid-19 restrictions disability service locations closed in March. On 31 May the framework for the resumption of adult disability services was published and the guidance to support this framework was published on 8 July. The guidance aims to enable safe, person-centred disability day service supports to be provided in line with current public health guidelines. On 28 September the Government

announced that €10 million is being made available in 2020 to support the resumption of day services and to enhance home support services for disability service users. This includes €7.5 million which will increase day services by one day per week for more than 14,000 adults. Unfortunately, the 24 adults in Meath to whom I referred are not benefitting from that. Has this money been allocated and if so, where to? What progress has been made on restoring vital services to provide some quality of life to service users and their families? What action has the Minister of State taken to ensure that all HSE-run centres for people with disabilities have been adequately equipped and all staff trained in Covid-19 protection measures? Have independently-run centres been given the support they need to maintain the provision of vital services to people with disabilities?

Senator Erin McGreehan: I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House today to discuss disability matters and disability day services in particular. As she highlighted in her opening remarks, difficulties with the provision of disability services arose during lockdown but great efforts have been made to reopen the services. I extend my sympathy and condolences to the 14 families that have lost loved ones. It is incredibly difficult for them to live with that loss now.

There is no doubt that many families, carers and service providers have been incredibly stretched, many to breaking point, throughout the course of this pandemic. We have all heard heartbreaking stories from friends, family members and neighbours of the personal toll and long-term impact of the withdrawal of services from people with disabilities, their families and carers. From mid-March day services and respite services were closed, as were most other sectors of society. While this proved very difficult for many people for a variety of reasons, it is fair to say that people with disabilities were disproportionately affected. I cannot imagine how upsetting it must have been for people who used these day services, who thrived in them, enjoyed their lives, saw their friends and took part in activities to have them stop so abruptly. It must have been so difficult for them, their families and carers.

The efforts of the dedicated staff have been acknowledged. They were working in uncharted territory and providing services in new ways, under new guidelines and in the face of new restrictions. Their efforts were truly incredible but none of us is surprised by the dedication of these workers. They have been doing tremendous work over many years. Their work has been under-resourced and, sadly, undervalued. Unfortunately the provision of these services will not be as it was prior to Covid-19 for some time to come. I welcome the announcement in September that €10 million would be made available to support disability services. I hope that we can continue to increase capacity in the safest possible manner. I also welcome the fact that the Government views the provision of disability services in the same way as it does schools and crèches. The intention that disability services will remain open at each level of the resilience and recovery framework is critically important.

The Minister of State said previously that disabilities are not merely a health issue. People with disabilities have a human right to be considered in every Government portfolio, including health, transport, employment, sports and the arts. We must ensure that every person in society, regardless of ability, is valued and supported in being able to fully participate in society. Day services are an integral part of this and the individual expression of these rights is facilitated by these services in many ways. I hope that we have learned from this pandemic that we must plan to react better to crises. We must have contingency plans in place to give the best supports possible to people with disabilities and their carers during all types of crises. Whether it is the implementation of social distancing or the use of hand sanitisers and face masks, we have all

come together to change our actions. Everyone came together to make sure places were as safe as possible so that life could carry on. This shows that when something needs to be done we can react very quickly to enable it so why can we not come together and push for the necessary measures to be put in place so that everything is accessible to those with disabilities who need it? Although future Covid-19 restrictions may not be needed to the same extent as now, accessibility for people with disabilities will be needed forever. Our living with Covid plan may correlate with the need to implement a living with accessibility plan. A sustainable long-term plan is needed for both of these measures.

With millions under lockdown, many non-disabled people are experiencing for the first time how it feels to have external barriers preventing them from participating in everyday life. Ireland and many countries around the world have put policies and practices in place to make public spaces, workplaces and other areas of society more accessible but far too many barriers still exist for people with disabilities. Many of the solutions needed during this pandemic have been requested by people with disabilities for years. If we had already built a physically inclusive and accessible society more could possibly have been done to shorten the lockdowns. Take for example the layout and design changes that help people with mobility issues. If all doors were already capable of opening automatically, it would be easier for people with some types of disabilities to move freely. It would also mean that nobody would have to touch door handles which would mitigate one risk of infection and possibly mean that everyone could get out of lockdown sooner. Similarly, if the gaps between aisles in shops were wider, as they should be to facilitate wheelchair users and others, then everyone would be better able to socially distance. If pavements were wider people could walk past each other with greater ease.

I commend the Minister of State on all of her work since her appointment. She is fully engaged and has fought to ensure that disability services are funded properly. She secured €100 million in the recent budget and all her efforts to secure additional funding have been truly commendable. Her attitude and enthusiasm for change is refreshing. I wish her the very best. Let us hope that in 2021 we can see some light and an improvement and an increase in the capacity of services for all.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Rabbitte, to the House. I thank her very much for giving us such a clear overview of the position on disability day services. I also thank her for her appearance before the Joint Committee on Disability Matters last week. It is very welcome to have such opportunities to debate with her the provision of services.

I acknowledge the importance of the Minister of State's statement that the provision of disability services is regarded as an essential public service. That is very much welcome. We acknowledged previously how important that is. I also acknowledge, as the Minister of State did, the immense work of both the HSE and service providers to ensure the continued delivery of safe services to person with disabilities. Notwithstanding that, the Minister of State also acknowledged there is still immense frustration among persons with disabilities and their families because services have simply not resumed to pre-Covid levels. I know the Minister of State is well aware of that and indeed she pointed it out herself.

Even before Covid-19 hit, day services were in the news for the wrong reasons, with service providers pleading for increased resources even at that point. In particular, service users were critical of the introduction of prohibitive transport fees for people travelling to day service facilities and people were left without sufficient provision on a temporary basis because of funding

shortfalls or capacity challenges. All of that was the case, as the Minister of State well knows, prior to Covid-19, but clearly Covid-19 represented an inordinate and unprecedented threat to the continuation of disability day services.

I welcomed initiatives taken by the Government and the Minister of State, since taking up office, for example, the funding announcement of €10 million specifically for day services. That was very welcome. Nonetheless, the frustration continues and the level of provision, unfortunately, still remains far too low to meet the real needs of persons with disabilities and their families. I have been in regular contact with the Minister of State's office about a particular case in my area concerning a boy who really does need to be in school full time, and he needs the support to do that. I know that it is a somewhat separate issue but I will continue to make representations on his behalf to the Minister of State.

I also wish to raise with her today a particular case that, again, would be known to her, that is, the case of Philip Kelly. He and his family have given permission for their names to be used. They have been campaigning for some time now for the resumption of day services. Philip has Down's syndrome and in normal times he attends day services for seven hours a day, five days a week. Like many others, he and his family went without day services and respite care during the strictest lockdown and even now the service has only been partially restored. Neither he nor the staff who work with him know when he will be able to build up his hours again. The service is extremely careful in terms of the provision of a safe service, yet the service is just not fully available. That is one example in my area in Dublin of the sort of frustrations that are experienced. The frustration of families and staff is immense, as they do not know when they can resume services in the normal way.

It is clear that there is a need to help facilities with adaptations to facilitate social distancing and to ensure safe and hygienic facilities. Sometimes facilities kept service users outdoors during the summer and autumn but that becomes more of a challenge going into the winter. Many families feel it is a continual battle to try to achieve the necessary services. The knock-on effect where the services cannot be continued or where they are only being provided in a reduced way is very clear to anyone who knows anyone with a disability, who has been dependent on the facilities. There is a serious impact on mental health and progress. I have heard in my office - I am sure that is also the case with others in the Chamber - reports of individuals who have regressed because of the lack of provision of day services. This is a serious issue for young adults and older adults alike. Key developmental milestones are being missed for young children with disabilities without important intervention such as speech and language therapy and physical therapy. It is a matter of grave concern to all of us that we are seeing this level of regression because of the knock-on effect of the crisis.

Carers too are being severely impacted. One carer who contacted my office said it felt as though a lifeline had been taken away by the removal of day and respite services. That is not an unusual description of the impact. The transition to working from home has been burdensome generally for many people across the State, but for those with additional caring responsibilities arising from the reduction in day service hours, this is particularly hard. Family Carers Ireland published a survey on caring through Covid. I know the Minister of State is well aware of it. The results pointed out that 60% of carers who responded reported that they worried about a decline in their own mental health and well-being as a result of the increased care burden during Covid.

Previously, in contributions on the issue I invoked the mantra of "build back better". That is

really what we need to see happen in the disability services sector, in particular in the provision of day care services.

Inclusion Ireland's report from July of this year on day services pointed out certain priorities for the Government in terms of our exit strategy from Covid restrictions. They include the timely reopening of day services, the full restoration of services and supports in line with new directions, funding for Covid-19 adaptations, access to therapy and respite services and, above all, that the voice of the service user is central.

Senator Róisín Garvey: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Rabbitte, to the House and congratulate her. It is great to see fresh legs for this new challenge we face because it is a tough one and there is a long legacy behind her. I wish the Minister of State the best of luck with the challenge she faces.

As she is very aware, day services provision was closed down, or limited to a skeleton support during the first lockdown. Since July, day services were reintroduced on a phased basis. I am delighted to hear the Minister of State refer to day services as an essential service. I hope that means that from today all the service providers will provide the full service they were providing pre-Covid. Let us see how that works out, as that is what everybody wants.

At present, the services remain patchy to say the least. Many adult service users are still not back in any day service, despite a clear commitment from the Government on a national level. Unfortunately, this has not always translated to the local level. Equally, several of the service users who are back are only getting a limited service, that is, a few days per week. We ask the Minister of State to urgently address the anomalies.

Several service users are adults with complex needs requiring hands-on support 24-7. Some of my friends have adult children with disabilities. It is hard enough to be a parent, not to mention the parent of a child with a severe disability and no supports. Cases are now documented of parents working fewer hours in their own jobs as they do not have additional support to ensure their adult children have appropriate care while they work. Other carers indicate they are suffering severe stress and burnout, as they have not had any real break for weeks or even months.

Carers also report increased stress, anxiety and inappropriate and agitated behaviour in their adult children who do not understand why they are not getting the services that are built into their routines. Families also report additional stresses among siblings and other family members because it is stressful for them as well. Some siblings are trying to study for their leaving certificate or trying to do other things in the house. It is an issue for the whole family, not just for individuals.

Dr. Susan Crawford has the patience of a saint. She started the first autism unit in Clare 22 years ago. Just a few weeks ago she was in the High Court, still fighting for services for her son. During Covid he went into repeated fits and catatonic states. She is still fighting 25 years later. It seems like every parent is left fighting for the services even though we know on a national level they are being provided and funded. Something is wrong. The main issue seems to be the lack of communication or joined-up thinking. Even if it is on the HSE hub that the services are available, they are not always there on the ground. Something is not right. I do not know the reason for the gap but it seems more like an abyss than a gap because the money is being provided and the workers are in place. I do not know what the solution is. Unfortunately, I am putting it back on the shoulders of the Minister of State. In the case to which I referred, it is

difficult to think that 25 years on, every time a new issue arises with her child the mother has to go and fight it. Money is being wasted in court. We must find a better way.

From the telephone calls and emails I have received it seems there is a lack of communication and clarity as to what is or is not available. The one thing worse than knowing one is not getting it, is not knowing what one is getting or when one is getting it. That adds another level of stress. I seek clarity specifically on when the services will be reinstated in County Clare. If there is a difficulty for service providers, is it due to staff shortages or Covid restrictions? If that is the case, how will we establish these services? In such situations, why has the HSE not stepped in to fill the breach with emergency staff if it needs to be done? We have seen that this has happened in nursing homes. Similarly, if the premises is not available to deliver a service due to Covid-19 restrictions, why are home care packages not created and put in place?

This issue comes up a lot with the disability sector. It is not just about empowering the individual - this is to do with empowering the families. If there are moneys available for the service providers and they cannot provide the service, should the money not then be available to the family itself to find carers? This has come up before for people who are adults and are capable of managing things themselves. It is a hand-up, not a handout. It is good for people to be empowered. If the service cannot be provided, maybe the family can be resourceful with the money that is there. The Minister of State has inherited a huge issue in this area but if any woman can sort it, she could be the one.

I would like to mention another aspect of this matter while the Minister of State is present and we are talking about disability. In my previous job, I worked for 14 years to get people out of cars and to promote sustainable transport. However, there is a huge issue around accessibility for people with disabilities who seek to move around our villages and towns independently. A lot of people with disabilities have the same needs as all the rest of us and they want to be independent. Sometimes they are really restricted due to a lack of pedestrian crossings, or because steps are too high, there are no ramps for wheelchair users or paths are too narrow.

I urge the Minister of State to consider that there may be a need for the Department of Health to engage with the Department of Transport. Engineers are great but they are thinking about cars and roads a lot of the time. People in the disability section of the Department would be able to reprioritise that and look for universal access. The designs have to include that. Lots of people with disabilities cannot drive but they can walk. However, they can only do so if they have safe infrastructure. There are some cases where the pedestrian crossings could be 1 km apart within a town. Disabled people cannot cross the road so they are restricted and they cannot go anywhere unless they get a lift. They are the same as the rest of us and they want to be independent. It would be great if there could be cross-departmental work on that issue.

I wish the Minister of State the best of luck and I thank her for all the work she has done so far. She is not in her job long but I have faith in her and I hope we can provide the best services in Ireland. I will support the Minister of State in any way I can to help her.

Senator Lynn Boylan: I welcome the Minister of State and I congratulate her on her appointment. We know and we can all agree that this pandemic has caused huge disruption to the lives of people with disabilities, especially those who avail of day services. Many day service centres were totally shut during the first months of the lockdown and while they are now open, they are, as the Minister of State has admitted, at a much reduced capacity. This is simply unacceptable. Day services are a lifeline for our citizens with disabilities and for their families.

These essential services provide support, routine and respite. The Government must provide the resources to allow the full reopening of day services for people with disabilities who avail of them.

The people who depend on these services have suffered disproportionately from closures. Inclusion Ireland, which was cited by Senator Bacik, carried out a study in July on the impact of the closure of day services on people with intellectual disabilities. A significant number of respondents reported increased loneliness and anxiety and an increase in challenging behaviour or anger. We do not know what the long-term impact will be on the people who rely on day services. Inclusion Ireland has also carried out a follow-up survey to the one it did in July and that will be published next week. Some of the headline findings make for stark reading. In terms of service loss compared to pre-Covid-19, 11% lost four days; 36% lost three days; 24% lost two days; and 5% lost one day. That means over 60% of people are being asked to make do with two to three days less than they are used to. Is this the height of the Government's ambition? I know it is challenging for everybody but those statistics tell us that the reopening has also been unequal.

We commend the service providers who are doing their best with inadequate resources. The Government is placing the responsibility on the shoulders of the service providers to make some very tough decisions. They have scarce resources and are being asked to decide who deserves them and who does not. These are impossible choices for people to make. I know the Government will probably say that Covid-19 means we just cannot provide full day services and that we are in extraordinary times. I remind the House, however, that this excuse did not wash when it was time to find the resources to open the schools. In August and September, the Taoiseach said the priority was to keep the schools and colleges open and that everything would be done to achieve that. I ask the Minister of State why it has to be different for people with disabilities? Where is the commitment to find the resources to overcome this? This is discrimination.

In October, Sinn Féin brought a motion to the Dáil and called for the Government to allocate enough resources to bring those essential services up to pre-Covid-19 levels. That means allocating for extra staff, physical facilities and transportation to facilitate social distancing. We are still hearing - and I know everybody's inbox is full from constituents contacting them - that some day services cannot provide transport and that where the person with disabilities cannot make his or her own way, he or she is just shut out from the service.

During the last economic crisis, and I know the Minister of State was not in government then, it was the vulnerable who bore the brunt of austerity. While this year's budget saw an absolute increase in provision for disability services, which is welcome, it was not enough to meet the challenge of providing full day services. The last time, disability interest groups and providers had to protest outside the House on Kildare Street. Once again, in this crisis, it is the most vulnerable who again bear the cost, only this time they cannot protest. The impact of the cutbacks is being acutely felt by the people impacted. Again, the figures from the Inclusion Ireland survey are harrowing and should alarm the Minister of State. They found that 93% of respondents felt their ability to participate in the community was worse or much worse; 88% had a lower quality of life since services were cut; 47% had a lower mood; and 34% were more withdrawn. Those statistics are deeply concerning and will have a lasting impact on the people who are affected.

We welcome any increase in funding for disability services in the budget but we would like the same attention to be given to disability day services as is being given to education.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I thank the Minister of State for being in the Seanad and I congratulate her on her appointment to this crucially important role.

I welcome the establishment by the Oireachtas of the Joint Committee on Disability Matters, which shall have within its remit the monitoring of the implementation by Ireland of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNCRPD. However, I hope that this commitment will be matched as soon as possible with the ratification of the optional protocol to that convention to allow for those with disability to make individual complaints to the UN. It is a massive shame that the optional protocol was not activated when the convention was ratified by Ireland in 2018 and it was a failure of the previous Government not to do so. The UNCRPD has to be rigorously implemented and enforced to be meaningful. The optional protocol is the most important instrument in this respect. Could the Minister of State please outline in the House the timeline for the ratification of the optional protocol?

It is estimated that around 13% of people in Ireland are living with a disability, with thousands of people using day services in almost 100 locations. Whether someone is attending day services for an intellectual disability or a physical disability, there is a real lack of options for people when accessing a day service that they choose or need. At the foundation of life for many people living with a disability is a desire to live well, do ordinary things and have agency over their lives. Day services are at the heart of creating and facilitating those structures to support this being a reality.

I recently read the New Directions report, which emphasised the goals and objectives of people attending day services in Ireland and what should be available to individuals accessing services. These include making choices and plans; creating transitions and progression; inclusion in one's local community; access to education, training and work; maximising independence; health and well-being; personal and social development; personal expression and creativity; having meaningful social roles; and influencing service policy and practice. To be a functioning society for all and when providing human services, there must be accountability, accessibility, affordability and quality assurance in all we do as a State in service provision. To achieve this, it is a must to continuously increase funding and ensure high-quality services underpinned by best practice and human rights. People must be central to this and this includes how services look during a pandemic. Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on those with a disability. It has impacted the direct delivery of services and access to healthcare and education and has had visible effects like the impact of further social isolation, disconnection and marginalisation arising from the national lockdowns. As we consider the impact on day services as we emerge from Level 5 restrictions in a short few weeks, we must be conscious of the reality as a society and as the economy reopens.

In light of former Senator John Dolan's legislation in the last Seanad that looked at changing facilities and accessible playgrounds, I thought about the messaging around lockdown. We have been encouraging people to get out but we still do not have accessible disability-friendly playgrounds for people to get out to during a pandemic. This is something we definitely need to look at and I hope to pursue and progress the former Senator's Bill in the next Seanad. It was returned to the Order Paper.

When I think about placing the individual at the centre of his or her care, be it a day service or residential setting, I think of a young man I have recently been supporting named Thomas Oonge and his family. He has been in a residential service for a long time called St. Catherine's, which has done outstanding work with him with regard to his ability, agency and personality. It

involves getting out for walks and attending Croke Park recently, which would have been unheard for him previously. However, once Thomas turned 18, there was a threat to move him to a different facility, which goes against keeping him at the centre of his own care given that he has been in this residential facility for most of his life and it has achieved a huge amount of progress in his life. I can send on the details of Thomas's family to the Minister of State because cost seems to be the issue raised most frequently in respect of keeping him where he is. It is crucial that he stays where he is for his own well-being.

I wish to highlight a need for funding in intellectual disability community-based residential services. People with an intellectual disability and mental health difficulties who are living in the community without family support are extremely vulnerable. There are currently no residential community placements available. I also wish to encourage discussion on the realities of adults living with intellectual disabilities in Ireland and their need for community integration, relationships, tailored therapies and meaningful goal-directed activity, which, as it stands, is not being met.

Independent Living Movement Ireland also argued that for disabled people, the language and discussion around disability often reverted to a medical view of disability. Persons with disabilities are consistently seen as high-risk regardless of their impairment and cocooning was imposed on some individuals removing their agency and choice as independent adults. The continued exclusion of disabled persons' organisations from policy development discussions and the exclusion of disabled persons' voices from the debates that affect their lives are highly problematic. Will the Minister of State ensure that disabled persons' organisations are represented at policy discussions regarding disability services and will she commit to listening to the voices of disabled people in order that their rights and dignity are respected?

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House to discuss the reopening of day services in the disability sector. I believe people with disabilities and their families have arguably been one of the sectors most disadvantaged by Covid. The closure of disability services in March took away a lifeline for many people and families. There have been very disturbing repercussions for users and their families. I refer to the survey carried out by Inclusion Ireland. I pay tribute to its outgoing chairperson, Lorraine Dempsey, who has done amazing work. When she described how service users were talking about their feelings about not using day services, she used words like loneliness, worry, anxiety and anger. Having a plan for service users is hugely important. Regarding family members and carers, sadly, there was an increase in challenging behaviours. This has been very difficult. The fact that no respite was offered during that period - there are delays in getting back into a regime of respite - is difficult for many families on many different levels. I ask the Minister of State to treat this as an urgent matter.

In the constituency in which I live, the services provided by KARE, the Muiriosa Foundation and Camphill Communities of Ireland are critical in catering to the needs of people with disabilities from Kildare, west Wicklow and parts of east Offaly. The loss of this service has been very difficult to deal with. The lack of stimulation experienced by many service users has led to a very sad regression that it will take years to get back, if we ever get them back. The reopening is welcome but at the moment, the highest rate is about 40%. I know the Minister of State talked about getting to 50%, which is welcome, but it is hugely important.

I have raised the redeployment of staff from the disability sector with the Minister of State a number of times. Children losing these disability services leads to regression. We cannot see

these children being abandoned, as is the case at the moment. I acknowledge the significant efforts made by disability services staff in upskilling and providing outreach but at the same time, one to one is what we want. I wish to raise the ongoing inequity relating to pay between staff in section 38 and section 39 organisations, which is completely wrong. We need equality of pay and to value those who work in each of those sectors.

I have spoken to the Minister of State about the voluntary sector. I am talking about local clubs like the Special Olympics and local Down's syndrome clubs. The Minister of State spoke about the investment coming from her Department, which is very welcome. Some of those other services that are being provided also need to be given the supports they need.

Senator Malcolm Byrne: It is good to see Senator Currie in the Chair. I note that I am the first male speaker in this debate, which is a message that needs to be sent out from this House. I encourage more of my male colleagues to come in and speak on this issue. I am particularly happy the Minister of State is in this brief. She has a real interest in and empathy for it. I know she visited a number of centres in County Wexford, particularly St. Aidan's in Gorey, which is close to my own heart. The people there extend their thanks to her for her achievement in the budget and some of the progress that has been made. As a Minister of State, she has put her money where her mouth is. She is investing and addressing the issues.

I echo the comments made by Senator O'Loughlin about the pay differential. It is wrong that pay in those voluntary service providers is behind pay in the HSE in spite of the fact that the staff are doing the same work. The problem is that many staff in voluntary day service providers are on 2010 scales rather than 2020 scales. Since 2013, the HSE has not increased the pay scales for those in voluntary service providers. This means that these service providers must spend a lot of time on fundraising.

Another crucial related issue is that we need to address early intervention, particularly in speech and language therapy, and assessment from a very early age, that is, preschool age. This is an essential support for disability services. I agree with Senator Ruane. Although I know the Minister of State is championing this, it is really important that the voices of those with disabilities are heard when it comes to disability services. I know the Minister of State is championing this and has put mechanisms in place, but in all of our decisions in this, it is absolutely essential that this happens.

Senator Martin Conway: As the second male speaker on this matter, and now that I think of it the only Member of the House actually with a declared disability, I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Rabbitte, to the House and congratulate her in her new role. Having been around the Houses with the Minister of State for the past number of years I have seen her commitment to equality of opportunity for all people. The Minister of State's particular appointment to this role will be critical going forward because of her deep level of commitment, understanding and knowledge.

I agree with a lot of what has been said so far about the reduction in day services. To be fair, looking back at last April and May we were in a situation and were dealing with something we had never dealt with before as a country. Day services had to close to protect people with disabilities who used those services and the staff who care and support them so well.

As we move on in the journey through this awful disease a good few services have been restored, but not all. Certainly they have not been restored to the capacity they were pre-Covid.

This, unfortunately, is a pity. Then again, it is grounded in the right reasons, which in the first instance is to keep people safe. As we learn to live with the virus, pending a vaccine, we will have to look at scaling up as much as we can in a safe way.

I have spoken with some families where the service is being provided, but where there is significant community transmission of the disease they have chosen to keep their family members at home and not send them to the day service. This is happening and is happening a lot more than people realise. It is not being articulated. I always like to try to be fair and bring balance to the discussion. I know that everybody involved is trying their best and they recognise that day services are critically important to the mental health and the development, including participation within communities, of people with disabilities. Equally, it is as important to the people who love them, care for them and who support them: their families, their communities and their friends. The full participation of people with disabilities is good for their families, their communities and for society. Most importantly, it is good for the person with the disability.

With regard to section 39 organisations I believe they need to be reviewed. We need a root and branch review on the funding of section 39 organisations. Some section 39 organisations' turnover is 90% or 95% funded through the HSE but there are others with a lot less than that. The National Council for the Blind of Ireland, for example, which is the national organisation that supports 270,000 blind and visually impaired people in the State, is 70% funded. It must rely on fundraising for the other 30%. Other equivalent national organisations are on 90%. That is probably a simplistic view on section 39 organisations. Their roles, how they deliver their services, and how the State gets value for money through them, all need to be examined and looked at going forward.

I acknowledge the Minister of State's predecessor in this role, former Deputy Finian McGrath. I worked tirelessly campaigning for the first step - as I would see it - in the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Great momentum was brought to that by the election of Deputy Leo Varadkar as Taoiseach and the appointment in 2016 of former Deputy Finian McGrath as the Minister of State sitting in Cabinet with specific responsibility for disability. It was good to see the convention ratified and I very much welcome the oversight committee that has been established by the Oireachtas to monitor its implementation. I absolutely agree with my colleague, Senator Ruane, on the protocol, which needs to be dealt with.

People who have a disability in Ireland need a level playing pitch and supports. The way a level playing pitch is created in the State is by ensuring the supports are put in place. When the supports are there all of society, not just people with disabilities, achieves its potential. It is a sad reality that some 80% of people with a disability find it difficult to get employment. That is well above the EU average. In Europe I believe it is 60%. We have a lot of work to do.

It is only correct to say that work has been done, the foundation has been set and the commitment is there. With the Minister of State, Deputy Rabbitte, working with the Ministers, Deputies O'Gorman and Donnelly, and with the committee, I absolutely believe that when this term of Government ends we will be in a far better space with supports for people with disabilities in the State. I wish the Minister of State well.

Acting Chairman (Senator Pat Casey): I am conscious of time, and the Minister of State must come back in. Will the final three Senators agree to five minutes each? Is that agreed? Agreed.

Senator John McGahon: Five minutes is more than enough. I would just like to make a couple of points, my remarks will be brief. I spoke to some parents yesterday in preparation for and anticipation of this debate, to get a fuller sense of some of the issues they are facing. I will talk about some of the issues today. The common theme I got from a number of parents yesterday is, essentially, that every single child is unique and different, as we all are, with their own personalities, wants and needs. At times we have a tendency to take a one-size-fits-all approach. Perhaps this is not the right approach, even at the best of times. Every child must be assessed as an individual, based on his or her own individual needs. I spoke with a wonderful parent yesterday who told me that there needs to be a child-led, progressive plan, and not looking at one disability and saying they all fit under one umbrella. This is the biggest issue, and one on which I believe we can all agree. The children may have the same disability on paper, which places them under that umbrella, but every child is completely different and every one has his or her own personality and unique way.

The second of my three points is that early intervention is crucial. The sooner one can start working with the child the better the outcome for the child and the family. Currently, however, there may be a two- or three-year waiting list to get that first initial assessment. While I do not want to use the word “damaging”, those three years can be a strain on families, a time which could be used to make life better for them. The parent I spoke with suggested that after the initial assessment there should be a follow-up assessment six months later and then ongoing assessments, as the needs of young children can change dramatically in that period.

A professional in the sector from my own county of Louth has told me that one of the biggest issues they faced in recent months was the number of highly experienced service providers such as occupational therapists and physiotherapists who were brought over to work in contact tracing for Covid-19. While that might have been acceptable at the start of the pandemic it is not acceptable now. We should be moving those highly qualified people back to do the jobs they are trained to do. We can train up new people for contact tracing to carry out that important task.

I also spoke with a parent from north Louth, right on the Border. My colleague there, Senator Erin McGreehan, will agree with me when I speak of the distances involved. If a family are from Omeath, for example, or from somewhere along the Border area, the nearest autism spectrum disorder unit is a 25-minute drive to Bellurgan National School, which only has between six to nine places. The next nearest drive is to Réalt Na Mara National School in Dundalk. If a family lives anywhere along the Border region in north Louth they would travel a considerable distance to get to the next unit. At some stage in the near future I would love to see a focused increase in providing more ASD units in rural areas such as in the parts of County Louth I have mentioned.

It is also worthwhile to consider making sure carers are given the same allowances for PRSI as a person actively working in the community. In many situations people give up full-time or professional careers to become full-time carers, and they should be treated in the same way and are entitled to do so with the same financial supports.

Finally, I was delighted to be put in touch with a lady from County Meath yesterday, Tracy Carroll, who some Members of the House may be aware of or have already encountered. She is a tireless advocate for children with disabilities. After giving birth, Tracy was sent home with Willow and, essentially, palliative care. It was said it was extremely unlikely that Willow would survive the following two weeks. Willow is now two years of age. While she requires

24-hour care and attention, it is an example of the type of care that must be included. One can see the innocence of things through the eyes of children. Willow has a four-year-old brother, Noah, and he refers to his baby sister as a magic fairy elf. She arrived on 1 December and that is the date in that house when the magic fairy elf comes along. Is it not wonderful that the innocence of a child makes him or her look at it in that way? That really struck me. Children with disabilities deserve their childhood as much as any other child, and we must try to implement that as much as possible.

Senator Aisling Dolan: I welcome the Minister of State from the west, Deputy Rabbitte. I wish to pay tribute to what has been done. Many people in the primary healthcare service have been working non-stop on the front line on Covid as well. In community healthcare organisation 2, CHO 2, covering Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, which the Minister of State knows well, one sees amazing work being done by Ability West and the Brothers of Charity in this area. I am pleased that all stakeholders, including Inclusion Ireland, were brought together in the framework for the resumption of day services. I pay tribute to the Minister of State for achieving extra funding for the extra day in-services, as well as the extra €100 million for disability.

There was a huge impact on families and carers, who are on the point of exhaustion, when the day services closed. There is no access to respite care, so it is great to see that this will happen. It was a relief to see so many of them opened in the third and fourth week of August. I appreciate the document that was uploaded onto the website with that detail. Almost 19,000 people with disabilities access these services across 1,000 buildings and premises. The Minister of State mentioned the importance of attendance at gyms and swimming pools. In the west we fought to ensure there is funding available to keep swimming pools open in both Tuam and Ballinasloe. We know the importance of physical therapy for people with disabilities. Swimming is for all ages and all abilities. Cross-departmental support is crucial in delivering what is needed for people with disabilities, such as working, perhaps, with the Department with responsibility for local government to ensure these amenities will not be lost in regional areas. Regional areas are crucial.

I have been speaking to providers locally and they are happy to see the funding for temporary posts. However, I was asked questions about funds to modify buildings to comply with public health guidelines. This involves many different types of buildings, being able to bring people in and the spacing between them. There is also the issue of funds for transport. More than 8,000 people use transport to get to many of the disability service providers. CLÁR is examining this as well, but what other funding has been allowed for transport?

The report from Inclusion Ireland of last June was mentioned by the Minister of State and Senator Ruane. It referred to 55 people with intellectual disability and discusses how people would be able to use technology if services or equipment were available. That was 80% of the 55 surveyed. Obviously, it is a challenge for those who are non-verbal, but we will be delivering services in a different way. Again, loneliness, anxiety and exhaustion came across, as well as access to therapy support, such as speech and language and occupational therapy. I have some questions for the Minister of State. What is the current allocation of staff in CHOs to Covid testing and tracing? Second, there is the timeline for the personal plans that are put in place for each of the users. It is a person-centred plan and includes what is required medically. What is the timeline for when that might be delivered? What funding is available for transport? If that information is not available, the Department might be able to provide it.

There is increased funding for home supports. It is wonderful to see the extra 5 million hours for home care, and to see a little increase in the disability allowance. However, we might need to look at that again because more families at home are trying to provide support to users. I was impressed by the total budget of €2.22 billion, which is definitely unprecedented. Regarding the background from Health Innovation Hub Ireland, I am anxious to see how this technology is being used. How are we linking in with eHealth Ireland here? Given the backlog in services such as occupational therapy and speech and language, how will we ensure that people get access? We need to be able to use technology, along with funding, to deliver these services, particularly Telehealth, Telecare, eHealth and Digital Health. I am not speaking so much about intellectual disability as people with physical disabilities.

It is important to be able to access initiatives in the CHOs. It is about bringing the health service into the 21st century. I have worked in the CHO and in Saolta, and I have worked with people working in these areas. I know how difficult it is, but we must ensure the technology is available to support the healthcare professionals to deliver this, particularly assistive technologies. Senator McGreehan referred to windows, doors, remote controls and so forth. It is very important to let people be able to live independently at home, especially now when they are not able to access day services. Are we investing in technologies such as screen reading for vision impairment, voice output communications and wearable technology, particularly with medication reminders? There are phenomenal companies and this technology exists. How do we work with Enable Ireland and the Disability Federation of Ireland to try to bring this across?

I will conclude, and I thank the Minister of State. My comments are really about how we use technology to support people.

Senator Seán Kyne: Every Member of the House has experience of dealing with parents and families of users of day care services. We see their frustration, tiredness and desperation. Their first priority is looking after their loved one. A common refrain I hear, especially from parents on behalf of their children, is: “I am fighting all my life.” They are fighting all their lives on behalf of their loved ones. That is a difficult place to be with regard to a service that is absolutely necessary. Often one sees family members doing the jobs of carers. They become part of the caring process out of love for, and out of obligation to, in some cases, their siblings or parents. That is tough on them. It is tough on young adults and teenagers, who have enough pressures and who might have siblings with a disability. Depending on the type of disability, it can be very hard on teenagers who have their own pressures, their own growing up to do and their own issues with social media, peer pressure and so forth.

I wish to acknowledge the service providers Ability West and the Brothers of Charity in Galway, charities that do excellent work looking after our most vulnerable citizens. Caring is very labour intensive. It is one-on-one caring. The cuts after the economic crash have been slowly reversed, but Covid-19 has had a very negative effect, obviously due to social distancing. Even the wearing of masks can be difficult because that is not what one would do under normal circumstances when caring for a vulnerable person. I am glad the Minister has provided extra reliefs and supports and I commend her on that.

Day services have been massively important for users. They like the routine. They like to know where they are going and to sit in the same place on a bus. They do not like being changed. They like to know that if they are getting on the bus first, they will continue to get on it first, and that if they are getting on it last, they will continue to get on it last. They do not like changes and those are issues that we try to resolve when they are brought to us.

Respite care is a lifeline for parents and siblings. It gives both the carers and other members of the family a chance to have a break and draw breath, to rest and relax and to recharge their batteries. Day care provides invaluable support for parents and families. They know that when they place a loved one in day care the child or adult is safe and in good hands, getting care or training in life skills from professional trainers. The training is very important for the people involved. Areas such as shopping, managing money, personal care and food and nutrition are all dealt with and are beneficial to the service users. I am concerned that day care services have been restricted for users due to Covid and the need to reduce numbers with social distancing. Users might only get two days one week and three the next. Having spoken to people in the services, there is uncertainty regarding transport services after Christmas, which goes back to my point that some of them feel they have been fighting all their lives. Day service staff numbers have been reduced to fill gaps in residential services, with a dependency on taking people from a relief panel when needed. These professionals need certainty in their lives. They have no contracts and even if they are offered one it is often for 20 hours a week which is not enough to allow a person to plan for a career in a very important area.

I am also advised that in some cases the technology in training centres is out of date, as Senator Dolan noted. There is sometimes a policy of making do and renting space rather than having purpose-built facilities. We have to stop the stopgap mentality and put in a properly planned, funded and managed service for our most vulnerable loved ones. Service providers are doing a great job on our behalf. It is our job to see that they get the resources they need to do what they would like to do and what the people who use the services deserve. I again thank the Minister of State for the work she has done so far in her Ministry and the funding that has been provided through this Government, as well as her involvement and advocacy.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): I thank everyone who contributed to the debate and the conversation this afternoon. Normally when I wrap up a conversation I try to address the people who have waited this long to contribute and give them answers or some form of feedback. I do not stick to a script, which concerns Department officials, but I will do my best.

Senator Keogan spoke about the 24 service users who have not returned to their unit. That unit is currently an isolation unit but I am led to believe that those users are getting an outreach model. I will talk to the Senator further about this afterwards but I did some my research while I was sitting here.

Senator Boylan spoke about Inclusion Ireland. That was my starting base when I became Minister of State with responsibility for disabilities. The report was launched the morning after I took up this position and there was an awful lot of reading within it. It might have come from a small basis but regardless the voices were heard very clearly and were reflective of many families and the frustration of people around the country. I look forward to next week's report. The Senator seems to have a little more information on the report than I do. I look forward to its publication next week in order to learn more from it. It will be reflective of what was said in the House this evening about the frustration and the struggle. I am acutely aware of that and that is what the budget was built on.

Senator Ruane asked for a timeline for the optional protocol to the UNCRPD and everything else. I am led to believe that much work is being done on that and we should see progress on it in the new year. The Senator is also aware of the work that is going on at the new Joint Committee on Disability Matters, which she acknowledged. We will be tick-tacking with that

committee and I wish its Chairman, Deputy Michael Moynihan, the very best of luck with it. It will be a great place with such a skill set from Senators and Deputies who will talk about the nuts and bolts of service providers on a day-to-day basis. We will also talk about the legislation that is needed to make things happen. It will be a good place where Senator Higgins and many other Senators can bring through the legal structures and strands that are needed to ensure these services work.

Senator Garvey brought up Clare and articulated the frustration regarding transport, which is a huge piece, as is the integration aspect of it. I am meeting the Minister for Transport, Deputy Eamon Ryan, and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Deputy O’Gorman, on Friday to discuss transport and integration and how we can make things more accessible. The Minister is spending €1 million a day on greenways, walkways and cycleways and we must ensure persons with disabilities can also have the same claw on that money. When we hand it over to local authorities or whoever, we must ensure the voices of those with disabilities are at the core because if something is good and inclusive enough for persons with a disability, it is inclusive for all. That is what I am trying to do there. I am trying to disability-proof things.

To go back to the county I share with Senators Kyne and Dolan, we cannot say enough good things about Ability West, the Brothers of Charity or Enable Ireland. That is no different for the providers in all other constituencies and counties. They do phenomenal work. Senator Kyne’s ending remarks were wonderful. They will stick with me and I wrote them down. He spoke about making do and how we have to stop the “make do” attitude. We have to plan, reform and put a sustainable sector in place. This sector is something we have made do with. This is not about a particular Government at any one time. It is about who can shout the loudest to make that space. I will work with all my Oireachtas colleagues, across all Departments and both Houses, to ensure that “make do” attitude changes and we put a sustainable structure in place.

Senator Kyne also spoke about integrating technology and Senator Conway mentioned employment. Technology will be such an important aspect of that. We talk about innovation hubs, community hubs and connecting people and for the first time ever, Covid showed us that we can connect people through technology and have that whole inclusion piece. That is what the €20 million fund is about, for the HSE or the providers themselves to show new innovations and new directions. They must show us what they will do differently as a provider and, if the Department is to fund them, how exactly they are doing something different and resetting the dial. Service users want to hear that we are prepared to reset the dial on disability and that is what that €20 million is about.

We also need collaboration and joined-up thinking with service providers regarding transport. If a bus from Ability West goes down a certain road and the Brothers of Charity go down the same road, then there are two buses from the one area going in the one direction. We might have a little bit of collaboration by having one bus providing a service to both families. That is inclusion and integration from the start. The bus might be bringing people to different providers but we can do that.

Senator Byrne referred to my visit to St. Aidan’s in Gorey. It was a good visit and a lot of learning was taken from it. I saw first-hand the beauty and the integration that was taking place, the workshop and the garden centres, how a community can evolve and where people with disabilities are at the centre of community. It was borne out well and we had a great cup of tea afterwards. That was prior to the current restrictions, in case anyone is wondering. It was

a very informative evening.

Senator McGreehan is my spokesperson on disability in the Seanad. She is my eyes and ears and keeps me updated on a regular basis. She spoke about the families of carers and the person-centred approach. We must acknowledge the role of carers at all times. Senator Kyne drew that out again. He talked about the impact of a whole-of-family approach and he is right about that. Teenagers doing their leaving certificate or junior certificate exams are stressed and do not know what is going on. That is awfully important for the parent who has to balance that care. I applaud carers and we should be doing more for them.

Acting Chairman (Senator Pat Casey): I thank the Minister of State for coming here again and for her commitment to the House.

Sitting suspended at 4.19 p.m. and resumed at 4.35 p.m.

Political Donations: Motion

Senator Barry Ward: I move:

“That Seanad Éireann:

notes:

- the decision of Sinn Féin to accept a donation in excess of €4 million from the estate of William Hampton;
- that the maximum donation allowable under Irish electoral law is €2,500 and that this donation to Sinn Féin is more than 1,600 times the maximum allowable donation;
- that the will of Mr. Hampton specifically states that the donation is for ‘the political party in the Republic of Ireland known at this time as Sinn Féin’;
- that the acceptance of this donation by Sinn Féin is deeply problematic and at best is at variance with the spirit of Irish electoral law;
- that there appears to be no meaningful manner in which to ensure that research, social media and political staff funded in Northern Ireland by this donation are not employed in this jurisdiction;

calls on Sinn Féin:

- to immediately return the amount of the donation in excess of the limit of €2,500 to the estate of William Hampton;
- to lay a statement before the Seanad no later than 31st December, 2020 outlining how it will ensure that no resources funded by its operations in Northern Ireland are utilised in this jurisdiction;

calls on the Government:

- to update the electoral laws to ensure that if a political party is registered in this State and in another jurisdiction, that registration in this State requires that it accepts no donation greater than those allowable under the Standards in Public Office Commission guidelines;

- to expand the Standards in Public Office Commission remit to cover such matters;

requests:

- the Standards in Public Office Commission to furnish a report to the Seanad by 31st December, 2020 outlining how it will ensure that no resources funded by Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland are utilised in any way in this jurisdiction.”

I propose to share my time with Senators Currie and McGahon.

Senator Emer Currie: I second the motion.

Senator Barry Ward: I am pleased to propose this motion on behalf of the Fine Gael group in the Seanad. It comes in the context of the legislation that relates to political donations and political funding in Ireland. All of us in this House know that in the past, the culture of political donations in Ireland involved politicians receiving money without any oversight or transparency. We are acutely aware of the damage that did to all aspects of Irish society, but particularly to the esteem in which politics was held in this country. It has damaged it and that damage is still apparent today.

In that regard, in 2001 the Standards in Public Office Commission, SIPO, was established to deal with exactly these issues and to put in place a framework that ensured political parties and politicians were accountable for the money they received and there was a control and a smacht, of sorts, in the manner in which money was spent in politics. After the establishment of SIPO, it became apparent that there was a gap in the legislation. It also became apparent - and this was one of the recommendations from the Moriarty tribunal report - that a cap needed to be put on the amount of money any individual, politician or party could accept as a political donation.

In 2012, the then Fine Gael-led Government proposed the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012. It first came into the Houses in 2011. It was debated first in the Seanad and then in the Dáil in the first half of 2012. The Bill addressed those recommendations and substantially restricted donations to political parties from private individuals and corporate sources. That was the first time there had been such a comprehensive attempt to address political funding in that regard. Section 9 of 2012 Act inserted a new section 23A into the Electoral Act 1997, subsection (1) of which limits the amount of money any person could give to a political party to €2,500. As a result of that legislation, in no circumstance may any one person give any more than €2,500 to a political party.

That legislation received support from all parties, particularly from Sinn Féin which welcomed the legislation into this House and spoke in favour of it. Deputy David Cullinane was at that time a Senator in this House. He spoke at various Stages during the debate and explained how the Bill tied into the broader issue of representation in politics. He mentioned that many people had turned away from politics because of what they had seen in the years before that. He said:

That is part of the problem in that there are still loopholes in the system. There are ways in which people can get around these limits.

It appears that was never as true as it is today. At a later Stage, he said, “It is important we ensure that in seeking to reform this area, we make it as accountable as possible.” I find myself in a position where I must wholeheartedly agree with that sentiment.

His colleague in the Dáil, Deputy Brian Stanley, welcomed the legislation, and specifically welcomed the reduction to €2,500 the maximum single donation that a political party could receive. He continued:

Political transparency is very important.

[...]

Limiting the influence of big business and of a small number of wealthy individuals on our political system is essential for the protection of a fair democratic system.

The then Senator Cullinane lamented the fact that in American politics, “billions of dollars are now being raised by the political parties and candidates”. In light of what we now know about the bequest from Mr. William Hampton, the only party on this island which seems to take in money in that kind of order is Sinn Féin. The situation now is that when it suits, Sinn Féin abandons the speeches of 2012, moves away from the suggestion that there must be transparency and moves away from the support for measures that restrict the number of donations that can be given to political parties.

We recognise there is a gap in the legislation. It concerns any party operating in Ireland and in other jurisdictions, which is not just Sinn Féin; it is also the Green Party and Solidarity-People Before Profit. However, neither of these parties received the €4 million bequest that came from the estate of Englishman William Hampton in recent times. The most notable thing about this bequest is that it came with conditions. It was, we know, and this is in the motion, for the political party in the Republic of Ireland currently known as Sinn Féin. The money was given to Sinn Féin for operations in the Republic of Ireland. Sinn Féin will undoubtedly say it operates in the North and it will spend that money in the North but it cannot have it both ways. The legislation in this jurisdiction is clear. Either Sinn Féin disagrees with the conditions of the bequest from Mr. Hampton or it proposes to spend it other than solely in the North of Ireland. The difficulty is we cannot be sure. We cannot know and this is the gap that exists in the legislation. This is why Fine Gael is bringing this motion.

Senator Emer Currie: Recent weeks have shown that Sinn Féin is willing to make four individuals in its party accountable for their actions but as an organisation, is it willing to be accountable for its actions? Is it willing to answer questions about its financial culture? This motion is an opportunity to do so. Sinn Féin is a party of contradictions. It prides itself on standing up for ordinary workers but it is the party of big money. It prides itself on being an anti-partition 32-county party but it is partitionist when it wants to be. It accuses others of vested interests but it flouts rules and, indeed, its own rules, and it certainly keeps its counsel when it suits its circle of friends. John Hume used a phrase in the 1970s and it is as relevant today. He said that one of these days Sinn Féin will disappear up its own contradiction. The question for my Sinn Féin colleagues today is simple. Can they put a price on principles? By voting “No” to this motion it seems they can.

Sinn Féin accepted a €4 million donation into the party's accounts in the North when it was bequeathed to Sinn Féin in the Republic of Ireland, taking advantage of much more lenient controls of political donations compared to the South. Some people may ask what does it matter. There are real concerns that Sinn Féin is dragging us back to the bad old days of Irish politics and cutting corners if people can get away with it. Sinn Féin is the party of big money. Its members do not notice £10,000 sitting in their bank accounts. I do not know a constituency organisation or a person, never mind four, who would not notice that type of money. Is it coincidence or culture? Its members are elected on the basis of abstention from Westminster but from 2010 to 2019 came £4.5 million in Westminster expenses. It is the richest political party in the country. In the North, its income last year was £2.5 million. By comparison, the SDLP's income was less than £150,000. It owns 50 properties in the South and is quite the landlord. It has a global fundraising network, especially in the United States. Friends of Sinn Féin has a site where people can directly donate money to support its activity in the North.

We need a fully transparent account from Sinn Féin on the public money that ended up in the bank account of a Senator of this House because it goes to the heart of the motion tabled by my colleague, Senator Ward. Was it a personal or political bank account? Is it normal practice for Sinn Féin politicians in the South to have access to political accounts in the North that are held to different standards in public office? Is any money in their accounts used to influence decisions or fund activity in the South? It returned the funds after the BBC and the *Sunday Life* uncovered connections. Why did it only take action when the media got involved twice? The Covid emergency fund was meant for struggling businesses that really needed the money. This is a bread and butter issue from which Sinn Féin cannot hide. Its party leader is adamant this issue is closed because she has dealt with it. Why move swiftly and ruthlessly on this issue and not on other grave issues that have affected other former Senators in this House, such as Máiría Cahill? Were issues like that not as important? It makes one wonder why they want this issue to go away so quickly.

Senator John McGahon: Tonight's Private Members' motion is linked to a €4 million donation provided to Sinn Féin which, according to the estate of William Hampton, is "for the political party in the Republic of Ireland known at this time as Sinn Féin". I really believe Sinn Féin has some real questions to ask itself and a chance to look at its moral compass, if one even exists, and decide what it will do with a €4 million donation.

If the spotlight had not been shone on this matter and if it had disappeared into the ether what would have become of it? It would have been laundered across the Border to infiltrate and influence political outcomes in this country. The money would have been swapped across the Border, as has been done on countless occasions, to undermine the democratic process. If this money is used in the Republic of Ireland, either directly or indirectly, it is quite simply subversive. Whether it goes to research or cash in hand for canvassers, extra office staff or election campaigns, it is subversive money that has come across the Northern Irish Border and has been laundered across it. For this reason, the spending of this cash, and all Sinn Féin cash, needs to be totally and utterly transparent.

This counts the same for all of the republican sympathisers, the armchair republicans in the United States who might find it difficult to point to the island of Ireland on a geographical map. They donate vast sums of money every year to the Sinn Féin Party. The €4 million donation, as far as I am concerned, is only the tip of the iceberg. It is only the tip of a deep, dark and corrupt pit of money that the Sinn Féin Party uses. It is time to shine a light on these dark corners of our democracy and illuminate what is actually happening and how a select group of people

in Belfast are directing it to undermine and influence the political situation here in this very Oireachtas.

I have spent the past few months listening to the concept of an all-Ireland approach to Covid and I firmly agree with this and with cross-border co-operation. However, the rank hypocrisy occurs when it is a €4 million donation into Sinn Féin's back pocket. When it comes to cash in hand there is no mention whatsoever of all-Ireland approaches, no mention of cross-border co-operation and no empathy with the everyday struggles people are facing. This is when Sinn Féin ceases to be a 32-county political party and becomes a six-county United Kingdom political party for the purposes of laundering money into the Republic of Ireland. This is the real irony of this entire situation. This is the legacy of Sinn Féin. It is a united Ireland party when it suits it for political record and a United Kingdom party when it comes to getting cash under the table. Unfortunately, where I come from, on the Border between Louth and south Armagh, we know all too well about money laundering be it fuel, cash or credit union robberies. Subversive elements have tormented communities on both sides of the Border. It was subversive laundering and the criminality of money that allowed someone who was described as a good republican by the former leader of the Sinn Féin party to live a charmed existence protected by his very own golden circle.

An Cathaoirleach: The next slot is the Independent Group's but it is giving way to Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile.

Senator Michael McDowell: I want to hear the answers.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: Some of it might depend on what comes next. I had to shake myself there because for wee second I thought I was at a Traditional Unionist Voice party conference as opposed to in the Oireachtas listening to some of the previous contributions but there you go and here we are.

This is without question the strangest use of Private Members' time I have witnessed since being elected to the Seanad in 2016. The motion before us surely represents the first time a political party is being criticised for adhering to its legal requirements. This debate, it seems, will not be about facts, or has not been thus far. Rather it has been about alternative facts. It is an attempt by Fine Gael somehow to suggest that adhering to one's legal requirements is something to be sniffed at. It is not. Sinn Féin takes our requirements very seriously and let me state the facts very clearly. Sinn Féin is an all-Ireland party. We are lawfully obliged to register as a political party in both jurisdictions on this island and to comply with relevant legislation and statutory regulations North and South. This state of affairs is a consequence of partition. If only it were not so but it is. It is the objective of Sinn Féin to dismantle partition and unite our country. We want to end policy disparity on the island. Instead of joining with us in that endeavour, those in Fine Gael and now Fianna Fáil, the artist formerly known as the republican party, tell us that such an objective is divisive. They tell us that it is contentious. They say, no, not yet but maybe in 30 years' time we can start to talk about it. That is their view but they are not shy about exploiting partition to play cheap and cynical political games like we are seeing here tonight because that is what this motion is all about.

Senator Ward is a barrister so understands that partition means that there are two legal systems on this island. He also knows full well that Sinn Féin meets all of its legal requirements. That Sinn Féin received a significant donation from a party supporter who died has been a matter of public knowledge for well over a year. We have made it clear repeatedly that this dona-

tion will only be spent in the North. We are in full compliance with the requirements of the Electoral Commission in the North. The Standards in Public Office Commission, SIPO, here in the South has confirmed to us that the subject matter of this donation is closed. The proposers wanted transparency and there is the transparency.

Fine Gael often boasts that it is the party of law and order. It is more like the party of law and order that now attacks Sinn Féin for what, I hear one ask, adhering to the law. If Fine Gael is serious about giving SIPO new powers then why did it not start by giving SIPO the powers that it actually wants? A former Fine Gael Member of this House, Michael D'Arcy, resigned recently to become a corporate lobbyist. In order to further regulate corporate lobbying, SIPO made a total of 22 separate recommendations during a review of the lobbying laws and asked for stronger legislative powers. None of those recommendations has been implemented. None of them has been proposed in Fine Gael's Private Members' time this afternoon because that would mean upsetting Fine Gael's friends in the banking sector and the world of high finance, the insiders, their mates or their "muckers", as we call them in Béal Feirste. That is the reality. Do not get me started on the blind hypocrisy of a number of Fine Gael Senators who have spoken or added their names to this particular motion. One of them, Senator Ward, when he was a councillor, claimed over €10,000 of public moneys for a college course. This drew sharp criticism from the Standards in Public Office Commission and rightly so. Why, because SIPO legislation did not, I repeat did not, allow for councillors to claim the cost of third level degree courses. Did Barry Ward ever pay that money back? Did he even consider it? If we are in the business of full transparency then that question should be answered. He is choosing not to, some buachaill.

Senator Barry Ward: I would happily answer. The Senator should not ask a question and then not allow time to answer.

An Cathaoirleach: It is quite simple. Standing Order 39.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I understand that the proposer will have an opportunity to conclude at the end of this debate.

An Cathaoirleach: Is the Senator not letting Senator Ward in now?

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: No, I am not letting the Senator in now.

An Cathaoirleach: All right. Senator Ward can speak later.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: The Leader of the Seanad is also a signatory to this motion. This is the same person who received illegal payments totalling over €17,500 as part of Fine Gael's-----

An Cathaoirleach: Can I clarify?

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: Yes.

An Cathaoirleach: Did the Senator say "illegal payments"?

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: That is the ruling.

An Cathaoirleach: Can I ask the Senator to withdraw that?

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: That was the ruling, a Chathaoirligh.

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An Cathaoirleach: Not in this House. We did not rule it in this House. I do not know to what the Senator is referring to so I cannot-----

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I will come to that in the course of my contribution.

An Cathaoirleach: All right. I just want the Senator to be careful with his comments.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I take the advice of the Cathaoirleach. I note that I will be careful and compliant with his guidance.

This was part of Fine Gael's creation of additional super junior Minister positions. So when the media started to ask questions about this, Paschal Donohoe's special adviser told his departmental press office, it is reported, to sit tight on this for now. This is the same Senator who after the liquidation of her Enhanced Solutions Limited company owed the Revenue Commissioners €60,000 and owed the State-owned bank, AIB, €50,000. So one can see why I will not take any lectures this evening.

An Cathaoirleach: I want Members to be aware that this is not a court of law. Accusations are being made to that regard and I have not been given advanced warning of them. Members want to be very careful not to stray beyond the bounds of what privilege is for.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I adhere to the advice and guidance of the Cathaoirleach. I respect it but I think everything that I have just read into the record is on the public record already.

This motion is not serious and that is the crux of things. It is a PR stunt and even the most ardent Fine Gael loyalist will see that is the case. The sheer arrogance and notions of the proposers that Sinn Féin would be told by them what to do in relation to a settled, legally compliant matter really does beggar belief. If I am being entirely honest with the Cathaoirleach I will not be taking those lectures.

This motion comes from a party whose leader was the subject of a confidence motion in the Dáil last night. Why? It was because of the insider cosy-club politics that Fine Gael is so wedded too. Leo Varadkar leaked a confidential Government document to a friend of his. That, again, is a fact. Favours for friends, connections to pals in the world of high finance, access to power while ordinary people are frozen out but fighting to have their voices heard. That is the politics of Fine Gael and that is why they are so determined tonight to sling mud because they do not like being called out for what they are.

Senator Mary Fitzpatrick: I wish to share my time with Senator Malcolm Byrne, if that is agreeable to the House?

An Cathaoirleach: Is it four minutes each?

Senator Mary Fitzpatrick: Yes.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Senator Mary Fitzpatrick: I offer condolences and sympathies to the family of Mr. William Hampton. It is really unseemly that anybody's will would be drawn into this type of a debate. It is really unseemly that public representatives, of any description, are actually debating the need for transparency around the funding of political activities in this day and age. If

this was 20, 30 or 50 years ago one might consider the debate acceptable. It is really offensive to the people of our country, the people who pay their taxes, the people who adhere to our laws and the people who expect us to represent them with dignity and transparency. The mud slinging that has gone on here only further demeans the issue.

Speaking on behalf of Fianna Fáil, we will be supporting the motion. The core of the motion is quite straightforward. The motion states categorically, which Sinn Féin does not dispute, that it is accepting €4 million of a donation, accepts that it operates in the Republic of Ireland and accepts that the laws in the Republic of Ireland prohibit donations to political parties above €2,500. Then Sinn Féin ignores that and conveniently accepts it on the other side of the Border. So Sinn Féin is giving two fingers to the deceased, to the expressed wishes in his will, two fingers to the laws of this Republic that Sinn Féin presents itself to participate in creating and upholding, and giving two fingers to every citizen in this country who abides by our laws. It is a completely unacceptable low point in 2020.

Mention has been made of all of the other funds, the \$15 million that has been collected in the US. How any public representative in this Republic could stand over the collection of funds in foreign jurisdictions, and the use of foreign funds to influence and affect the outcome of our elections, is beyond me. Regarding the £30,000 or £40,000 that was resting in God knows how many bank accounts and how many currencies, €10,000 is an awful lot of money and that any political organisation did not notice the money, not just for days or weeks but for months, is unbelievable.

I am delighted that the Minister of State is here. I want his office to impress upon the Standards in Public Office Commission the importance of this issue, not to any of us individuals but to the people that we represent. It is incredibly important that we uphold and defend democracy, and that every resource of the State is used to defend that. The request is very simple in terms of what we are asking the Standards in Public Office Commission to do. SIPO engages quite vigorously with individual public representatives. This is a large amount of money and Sinn Féin is a very large organisation so I expect that it will have no difficulty in laying before the Seanad a report by 31 December of this year to ensure that no resources are used inappropriately or to distort our democratic processes in this Republic.

Senator Malcolm Byrne: I welcome the Minister to the Chamber again. An issue arises regarding the essence of our democracy. We have had the opportunity in these Chambers to discuss questions about political funding and outside influences in politics. There are a number of points I want to raise. First, a question has to be asked about the donation of €4.6 million.

5 o'clock

An issue arises over media probing. I challenge the media in that if in the past a donation had been made to a leader of Fianna Fáil, the likes of Vincent Browne would have been exploring in great detail how a gentleman with seemingly no means had over two dozen bank accounts worldwide, including an account in a bank in Singapore with over €1 million. I question why investigative work has not been done by the media in this regard. Part of the problem is that, in all these matters, Sinn Féin is perceived to be above the law and it is not scrutinised to the same extent as other political parties. Every political party should be scrutinised and held to account. Any of us who has dealt with the Standards in Public Office Commission knows the extent to which it goes through all our election returns and asks questions, even about the smallest amounts. We know how long it takes it to address this. We have robust legislation but I believe it needs to go further. I hope the electoral commission legislation will address this.

Senator McGahon referred to money being spent on election workers and so on. I am more concerned about the spending of money on online political advertising. While it is very easy for a party in the North to say it will not be paying for posters and so on down south, expenditure of €4 million on political advertising could have a huge impact on our election. We have noted the polarisation in the United States, much of it driven by online advertising. I encourage those who may not have seen the film “The Social Dilemma” on Netflix to watch it to learn about the polarising effect of online political advertising. I have no doubt, and there is evidence, that Sinn Féin has started to use online political advertising to polarise our society.

My final point is on our debate in general. I would worry if our debate became polarised, with Fine Gael on one side and Sinn Féin on the other. All political parties in this House have different views but it is very difficult when engaging in detailed policy discussion to compete with a fancy meme or a trendy hashtag. From a policy perspective, we have got to ensure, for the safety of our democracy, that we start to protect policy.

I am going to respond to Senator Ó Donnghaile’s attack on Fianna Fáil’s republican credentials. It is all very easy for Sinn Féin to ask for a Border poll, with no thought about the consequences. The difference between Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin is that Fianna Fáil thinks these things through. Sinn Féin decided to campaign against Brexit after the referendum but Fianna Fáil wants to prepare for these issues. In those circumstances, I defend my party’s republican record. I defend the fact that we have set up a shared island unit. We can listen to all the slogans and the fighting between Sinn Féin and Fine Gael but I am not going to allow polarisation in politics to develop. Fianna Fáil, as a party at the political centre, will respond with policies.

An Cathaoirleach: Before I call on the next Senator, Senator Moynihan, I wish to remind Members that when they are making allegations in this House, they should be very careful because their comments could have serious consequences for the reputation of the House and its Members. I want people to have a debate, obviously, but to be respectful.

Senator Rebecca Moynihan: I am sharing my time with Senator Sherlock.

I am somewhat dismayed to be here listening to what seems to be the defining political narrative of this Oireachtas, which involves Sinn Féin taking a populist pop at Fine Gael over elitism and Fine Gael bouncing back with a swipe at Sinn Féin over underhand tactics. The rest of us are caught in this arrangement that is mutually beneficial to both parties. A confidence motion in an individual took up Dáil time yesterday and now we have this issue, which involves one party taking up our time. It gives energy to the Sinn Féin and Fine Gael benches but, as Senator Byrne said, it can be quite draining. What is happening is taking place at the expense of policy.

It is important, however, to speak to the wider issue of money and politics, including how money can influence politics. The donation from the estate of William Hampton to what he defines in his will as the political party operating in the Republic of Ireland known as Sinn Féin has exposed a loophole in our donation system and it is a warning shot indicating what might happen if we do not close it. The issue here is not what one political party does; it is the bigger, more general issue of one person making a donation so large that it could reasonably influence our electoral system, and of somebody with access to a significant amount of cash being able to fund his or her pet political party or project. Sinn Féin will argue that this is not the case and that it did not ask for the donation, but it has the power to decide what it is going to do with it. It has decided to go against the spirit of the law in the Republic of Ireland by keeping it.

Let me give a couple of hypothetical examples. If somebody living on an offshore island and with Irish business interests decided to donate money to Fianna Fáil's sister party, the SDLP, which was registered, and it in turn decided to give money to Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin would be jumping up and down. It would be right. That is essentially what is happening here. Sinn Féin does not have a leg to stand on regarding money in politics and elitism if it accepts a donation when it suits it and if it is saying it is acceptable for other parties to do so. There is a principle at stake, that is, that rich people and people who have access to wealth should not be able to fund their own pet political projects. It is a principle we should all stand over. The interaction between politics and money does not serve people well and has not served us well in the past. We cannot pick and choose when we are going to apply the principles or pick and choose regarding jurisdictions and laws.

Let me refer to another hypothetical scenario. If an Irish national party registered in both the Six Counties and the Republic received a very large donation from a nativist Irish American who supported its deluded desire to have an imaginary island it heard about in tales about making Ireland for the white Irish again, we would all have a problem with that. That is what the laws are designed to stop. In the United Kingdom, money was funnelled to the DUP for the Brexit referendum campaign to get around campaign expenditure limits. In the very last days of the campaign, the DUP suddenly had access to a large amount of cash to influence the referendum result.

This issue is much bigger than that of Sinn Féin or one political party but for all of us to have credibility regarding the wider issue, Sinn Féin needs to be willing to return the donation. It is about the principle of protecting democracy and not allowing it to be subverted by the political whims of one rich individual. We should all be in favour of that.

Senator Marie Sherlock: There is a certain irony in the fact that at the end of last week, Fine Gael Senators had a motion on the Order Paper on the issue of young people. As this House knows, young people are enduring an incredibly tough time. There is an unemployment rate of 20%. We do not have the safety valve of emigration and there are fewer opportunities to engage in activities, socialise or meet friends. There is a very genuine prospect of having a lost generation. I believed it was a really good idea to have a motion on young people to debate the resources and investment they need but the motion got the shove. We see the real priorities of Fine Gael this week. It is very unfortunate that this matter is taking up two hours in what is a precious Seanad schedule. We do not have a very long time here week in, week out, yet two hours have been allowed to debate these issues. It is regrettable that Fine Gael has chosen to spend its time like this. There are serious issues with regard to political spending in this country. On the motion itself, when we look around the world, we can see the impact of big money on democracies and the threat posed by money from certain countries undermining political systems. We see the emergence of the far right. While it might be small in this country, it is growing. There are serious issues for our political system. Those of us elected to the Seanad and the Dáil, or as councillors, have to assure the citizens of our country and those who vote for us that we have a fair, transparent and democratic political system. Part and parcel of that is how political parties and institutions are funded.

I would say to Sinn Féin with regard to the motion tabled that there is an onus on the party to put before this House a statement that the funds it has received from the estate of the late Mr. Hampton were not utilised in this jurisdiction. Sinn Féin may ask why it is being held to a higher standard than any other political party. I would say that it would serve Sinn Féin better and our political institutions better if we had that transparency and credibility in giving us as-

surances that that money will not be used. There is an issue regarding how we do our business in this House and the use of motions. Every political grouping in this House has just two slots for Private Members' business between now and Christmas. It is regrettable that Fine Gael has decided to use this time to talk about these issues instead of bringing forward a Private Members' Bill to plug the holes that it has identified in the legislation. I want to correct Senator Ward about comments he made earlier about his party introducing legislation. It was the Labour Party in government in 1997 that first introduced the caps on political spending in this country and it is important to have that on the record.

Senator Michael McDowell: This motion raises important fundamental points. Although there has been considerable crossfire in the Chamber this evening, there are historical matters which must be addressed too. I was in Weston Park in Britain in 2001 when the Irish Government was informed that senior members of the republican movement were in Colombia. They were selling military know-how to FARC, a Marxist guerilla group there, in exchange for approximately \$20 million, which was funded from the narcotics trade by FARC. That was in 2001, three years after the Good Friday Agreement. The Good Friday Agreement finally bedded down in 2006 at the St. Andrews conference and got going thereafter.

During the period from 2002 to 2006, I was aware, as Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform of major criminality of a fundraising kind being orchestrated from Belfast by senior figures in the republican movement. Robberies were committed here in the city of Dublin, concentrating on proxy theft from Dublin Port. There was the Makro robbery in Northern Ireland, a celebrated case of a provo fundraising operation. As we know, there was the Northern Bank robbery too. Senior Sinn Féin people were involved in laundering the proceeds of that robbery. I cannot at this stage turn a blind eye to all that and say that that fundraising was something which we can just blithely ignore.

Senator Currie has mentioned the 60 premises in this jurisdiction owned by Sinn Féin. Where did this money come from? Who pays for these premises? There are many other issues, such as the non-application, in a secure way, of the Irish laws on political donations to the Sinn Féin Party, because it is organised as a single entity on both sides of the Border.

It is important that this House knows about the years from 2002 to 2006, when the Government of which I was a member was putting everything into ensuring that the Belfast Agreement succeeded and that the semtex was handed up, with the signs on Belfast roadsides reading "Not an ounce, not a bullet". During those years, we were insistent that the provo machine gave up criminality and stopped shooting people in their knees in back alleys in Belfast, and that it should undertake to accept the rule of law and the legitimacy of the Police Service of Northern Ireland unequivocally. We spent much time trying to achieve that. There was a struggle, with ambivalence and foot-dragging, and a desire to keep people like, I am sorry to say, the late Bobby Storey, immune from the public glare. He was identified as the organiser of much of the Provisional movement's criminal activities. I will not go into the fuel laundering and money laundering activities which took place along the Border.

I want this House to know that the then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, and I were conscious that we were not insisting as part of the overall implementation of the Good Friday Agreement that the increasingly severe money-raising restrictions on Irish political parties to which the last speaker referred, starting from 1997 onwards, would be immediately applicable to Sinn Féin. During those years, I, as Minister, went to North America and spoke to very rich American businessmen who were contributing large sums of money via Friends of Sinn Féin and other

events to fund the Sinn Féin Party in this jurisdiction. I remember pointing out to them that they should look at the permanent representative of Sinn Féin in Havana and at the FARC connections of Sinn Féin, and ask themselves if it is really a political party which they should donate to. We made the calculation at that time that it was important for the Sinn Féin movement to be brought across the line and that there was a significant Sinn Féin activist element in North America, with the chief function of raising money for the republican movement, as they wrongly called it, on this island. Bertie Ahern and I took the view that the priority was to get the Good Friday Agreement up and running, and that an insistence on dismantling all the Sinn Féin money-raising activity in America would be counterproductive.

The time has come for everybody in this State to operate on a level playing field. We had examples of claims made in this House, and elsewhere, to the Irish public, that Sinn Féin Deputies donated everything above the average industrial wage to the party. If that was the case at the time, that was clearly unlawful, because that exceeded the amount permitted by law. I only want transparency and a level playing field for all participants in our democratic process. The thought process that led me and the then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, not to insist on strict controls on foreign fundraising must now end. I will finish on this point. We must legislate to make sure that everybody, whether they organise themselves like the Green Party, North and South, or not, plays on the same level playing pitch, by the same rules and with the same standards of honesty and that the legacy of distorting the democratic process by moneys obtained in the manner I have described ends now and never recurs.

Senator Pauline O'Reilly: I will share time with Senator Garvey. I am here as the leader of the Green Party and, as has been mentioned by the proposer Senator Ward, the Green Party is the only other party in this Chamber that operates North and South. Therefore, I will lay out our perspective on this. The motion calls on the Government to update the electoral laws to ensure a political party that is registered in this State and in another jurisdiction, such as north of the Border, accepts no donation greater than those allowable under SIPO. We certainly agree with that and have no problem with that. I wonder why anyone else would have a problem with that.

We can look at donations in three different ways. We can say to ourselves: "Here are the rules. This is what SIPO says. We are, as a party, going to look at those rules and we are going to go a step further and put in place within our own party more obligations." The second thing we can do is to look at SIPO and do exactly as it says, as most political parties will do. The third thing we can do is look at what SIPO says and say: "Is there an offshore bank account we can put our money into? Is there a loophole that we can find?"

Fundamentally, this comes down to a matter of ethics. We know from looking at other jurisdictions across the world that we have all been complaining about what has happened with Brexit, repeal and the 2016 election in the United States. Then we sit here and say we think Ireland should follow the same path. I think not. It is up to Sinn Féin to say it is leaving behind its past and is moving into the democratic process we are all involved in.

It has been mentioned that Sinn Féin has 200 staff and more than 50 properties. I have done a back-of-the-envelope calculation and Sinn Féin is also entitled to 110 staff within Leinster House. That is more than 300 staff. We are operating in a system where we are trying to compete, for want of a better word, for votes against these parties. We simply cannot do it, particularly online. I do not know, coming from a party that operates North and South, how anybody can reasonably have an all-Ireland campaign and say they are satisfied they are not using that €4 million. Will there be staff employed North of the Border who will retweet things? Will they

retweet tweets down South? How will Sinn Féin show and convince us that is not happening?

The easiest thing for Sinn Féin to say is that it is not taking the €4 million. I have here the will and it is incredibly clear that it is to cover election expenses, to fund Sinn Féin offices and advice centres, to aid republican prisoners and their families in both Ireland and Britain, and that it is to be held in trust for the political party in the Republic of Ireland. It is incredibly clear. I do not know how that obligation could be fulfilled if the money is taken up North in the first instance.

The easiest thing to do is to give back the money in excess of €2,500, but I also call on the Minister to put that obligation in place. It would also be an obligation on the Green Party, the only other party here to which it would apply. I further call on the Minister to come back to us before 31 December as to how he might reasonably check how the funding is being used.

Senator Róisín Garvey: It is a shame that we have to use Private Members' business for this kind of thing but that is what it has come to. Nobody wants to use Private Members' business for these kind of situations but it is a grave situation. Most of all, I am confused. First, I am confused there are so few Members from Sinn Féin here, as it is a grave issue. There is one person. That is quite shocking. I am also confused because Sinn Féin says it is an all-Ireland party, but is it or is it not? If it is, how can it justify not allowing some of the money it gets to be spent over the Border? That seems un-all-Ireland-all-inclusive, as it were. Nobody has created a way to control social media and where it goes. Sinn Féin wants no borders and social media is one place that has no borders. I am deeply confused about that and perhaps a Sinn Féin Member will take a minute to explain it to me. Perhaps I am missing something.

A real republican party wants to unify, not divide, so it would not divide the money across the Border. Sinn Féin has an opportunity today to unify all the people in the House and perhaps in Ireland who have trust issues around where this money has gone. Sinn Féin has an opportunity to unify people today, instead of being divisive, explain clearly how it justifies having this amount of money and convince us it is not being used in the South.

Senator Martin Conway: I am sharing time with Senators Ahearn, Dolan and Seery Kearney. I do not believe in being unfair to people but I think what has happened in this situation is that this legacy has shone a light on the cash collecting that Sinn Féin has been engaged in for the past two decades.

I remember seeing a video in a documentary by Ann McCabe, husband of the late Jerry McCabe, who was murdered by the IRA, where she secretly filmed a Sinn Féin fundraiser in New York where Gerry Adams in his opening remarks said he thanked the participants and that they had raised a quarter of a million dollars. That is at one fundraising dinner.

I have two simple requests for Sinn Féin. First, hand back this €4 million legacy because it is the right, decent and proper thing to do. Second, introduce legislation in Northern Ireland that reflects the legislation that exists in this country in terms of SIPO. Two things: hand back the money and bring in the same laws in the North that exist in the South. It is simple and it would start the journey to transparency, which is what we want in this country.

Senator Garret Ahearn: I stand in support of the Private Members' business. I have been a Member of this House for six months and have worked with Deputies and Senators in other political parties and Independents alike. Although I disagree with them on a range of issues, I never doubt their sincerity. I cannot say that about Sinn Féin. I doubt that party's Members'

sincerity on almost every issue, and this is a prime example. Every decision they take is not about what is right but is based on what is popular. It was for water charges until it was against them. It wanted to leave Europe until it wanted to stay in Europe. It is all fake. The best example of this has been the past few months during Covid. When Sinn Féin was asked if we should enter lockdown again, it could not answer. Why? Because it did not know what the public mood was.

Sinn Féin's politics is about dividing people and communities, pitching certain groups and sectors against each other. It claims to represent the ordinary working class but it does not. It has proven this in Northern Ireland, giving only £100 to people who lost their jobs during Covid. It talks about high moral standards but when most of the party attends a gathering of 2,500 people in Belfast, no one accepts accountability. Sinn Féin seems to think it is believable that someone could have £10,000 in their bank account for six months and not know about it and it claims expenses in the House of Commons while not attending. If this was any other political party in the State, it would be extinct.

Sinn Féin should not accept the €4 million and, as the richest party on the island, the least it should do is pay back the State the €25,000 it wasted last night on a motion of no confidence in a man who stands for everything that is the opposite of Sinn Féin - honesty, integrity and accountability.

Senator Aisling Dolan: I will share my time with Senator Kyne.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed. The Senators have one minute each.

Senator Aisling Dolan: I support Senator Ward on this matter. The rules apply to all of us and standards in public office are for all candidates and parties. I do not understand how it is possible to accept a donation that is 1,600 times the €2,500 limit on donations. That limit applies to protect democracy in our State by ensuring that all candidates have the same chance to be a public representative. Otherwise, it would be impossible for anyone to run for public office. I had the opportunity to run for office and we are lucky to be able to do that in Ireland because it is extremely expensive to do so in many other countries. It is about transparency and accountability.

I am worried about polarisation and populism which deny factual and evidence-based argument and remove the middle ground for compromise. We can see that happening on social media in many ways. We must stand up now for Ireland's democracy.

Senator Seán Kyne: I listened with interest to Senator McDowell's contribution and it will be worth listening to it again or reading the transcript. We all follow US politics and have been doing so for the past while. We know the cost that a politician incurs in US politics in terms of fundraising requirements and all that. I would assume that US business people are very well versed in being asked to donate to a political party. Sinn Féin has the great advantage of being able to fly a nationalist flag and paint a picture of an old Ireland that is long gone.

What we have in our democracy is a low-cost, low-spend, transparent and accountable system of politics. All anyone would ask is that there is a level playing field for those of us who put our names on a ballot paper and go before the public in order that we are not in competition with a political party that is not following the same rules and guidelines. How can we know that the €4 million has not been spent, or will not be spent, in this jurisdiction by whatever means and however Sinn Féin wishes to do so? That is the issue here. I acknowledge and commend

the motion proposed by Senator Ward.

Senator Mary Seery Kearney: I am supporting this motion and very much commend Senator Ward for bringing it forward. The claiming and taking of this money is a statement of sheer hypocrisy from a party that champions a 32-county island and claims it is the only all-Ireland party. It talks about unity and what its representatives stand for. They wrap themselves in the Tricolour at every possible opportunity. Sinn Féin had seats at a time when Ireland needed voices on the floor of the House in Westminster but its representatives refused to take an oath of allegiance to the crown and all that goes with that. At the same time, the party was happy to apply the rules of the crown when it came to making sure that they get to hold onto the money while using and abusing the fact that it operates in two jurisdictions and that the rules are different in the North. Sinn Féin is not adhering to the content of the will as was put before it. It chose to circumvent that.

This is about democracy for all of us. We have all gone through the painstaking effort of ensuring we are within the SIPO rules by making sure that we file our returns properly, keep our receipts and do everything we can because we believe in a democracy of equals. Everyone here can approach and stand for public office on the basis that they know the rules, play by the same rules and respect each other. We may disagree on policy but we respect each other.

All across this House and the Dáil, there is a nasty social media campaign where discourse is lowered to the lowest common denominator. It is akin to the stories that we hear and the testimonies that come out of the experience of Cambridge Analytica. We cannot be assured that moneys received by Sinn Féin are not being used to influence public thinking in a way that means members of the public are not even aware their thinking is being changed. We cannot be assured that social media discourse is not being abused and used by Sinn Féin using this money. It needs to return the money and stand up with integrity, if that is possible, and in so doing ensure it is adhering to the rules of the Republic of Ireland that it claims to support and promote.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: I will resist the temptation to use this debate as an opportunity to vent my views on Sinn Féin. I will not do that. My views on Sinn Féin are well known and I am sure their views on me are also well known.

This is a serious motion and I am surprised that the Chamber is less peopled not only by Sinn Féin but also one or two other groups that are vocal on most issues. They are disappointingly absent here tonight.

Money and politics have a fraught relationship at the best of times. No political party is as pure as the driven snow and there have been well-documented incidents of less than appropriate behaviour in receiving funding for elections and so on in my party and others. When the average member of my party thinks about fundraising, he or she thinks about standing outside the local church on wet, wintery days, taking up a national collection. He or she thinks of going door to door to the party faithful, selling a raffle ticket at Christmas or perhaps trying to get money into our super draw once a year. I have organised nights at the dogs, the races and every other thing because I am useful at fundraising and make myself useful.

Sinn Féin missed the opportunity of the century when it received this extraordinarily strange windfall. Its representatives could have said to themselves that it was not right for them to accept it, north or south of the Border. This was their opportunity, if they mean what they say, to forgo that windfall and say they are not going to be seen in any way to endanger the democratic

process on this island and to reject the dangers that such a sum of money presents not only to themselves but to the body politic. Did they make that choice? They did not. They took the seedy option of pretending that the money was really for Sinn Féin in the North, where there are, unfortunately, no consequences for accepting such a huge amount of money. That money would skew any election. I know what it costs to run a general election campaign. Our party is in significant debt at the moment after the most recent election, as, I am sure, are the other major parties represented here other than Sinn Féin. It is awash and knee-deep in money. Money has become a huge part of the *raison d'être* of Sinn Féin. Is it receiving these funds by way of small donations from the ordinary man on the street? Of course not. If it were, I would take my hat off and respect it. There was considerable spending around the election in America and Joe Biden, thankfully, made use of his huge coffers but that money, in the main, came from smaller donations across the board. Sinn Féin talks the talk but will never walk the walk.

Like the Cathaoirleach, I have worked with Sinn Féin representatives at local level in Kerry and many of them are personable, decent individuals. There are also decent individuals from Sinn Féin in both Houses of the Oireachtas. However, when it comes to the national issue, Sinn Féin Inc. in its latest manifestation, of which there have been many, is a threat to this State. I honestly believe that and would not say it if I did not believe it. Sinn Féin wants to subvert this State. It has tried to do so time and time again. I am old enough to remember when Jack Lynch and Des O'Malley had to have round-the-clock protection because of death threats to them from Sinn Féin-IRA. That was not all that long ago.

Senator McDowell spoke eloquently about what the Good Friday Agreement had given us - thankfully, a valuable type of peace in the North. It has not given us normality or a normal society, though. Nor will there ever be a normal society as long as one group is consistently posing a threat to the way of life of another. Nationalists were on the receiving end of that type of bullying throughout the 1960s. John Hume, Austin Currie, Seamus Mallon and others picked up the cudgels that were used against them, but their best efforts were interrupted and sidelined by the men of violence, who had no support from the people. I had to laugh when I saw Sinn Féin people on social media glorifying their wonderful election result - more luck to them on the great result they got - and how they were flying in the polls. What interest had Sinn Féin in polls when the IRA was murdering people morning, noon and night in the North and when it was robbing banks and shooting gardaí and Army personnel in the South? They did not have even 5% of the people's support, but they did not give a damn. It did not matter. They are different that way.

I will go back to the basics and say what I started with. I appeal to Senator Ó Donnghaile. It is not too late to refuse the money. What does Sinn Féin want it for? It has enough. It should fight its elections like the rest of us - on its feet with the support of the people. If Sinn Féin gets the support of the people, I will be the first to say "Good luck on getting elected". It is on a figure of 30% or so at present. Its members have lost the run of themselves. Adolf Hitler got into power with a similar vote. We will not be so foolish down here.

I will appeal to the Senator on another matter. When he and his colleagues are referring to this body down here, we are not a "state". This is the Republic of Ireland, and I am proud to say I am a member of that Republic. When people of his party, in the hot flush of an election, start saying "Up the Ra" and "We broke the Free State", it will be remembered long after the shouting and celebrations in Waterford are forgotten. I appeal to the Senator to use his good offices and refuse this money. Do the decent thing. Stop trying to fool the people that Sinn Féin is a Northern Ireland party when it suits it and a Southern Ireland party at other times. Hand

back that money. It will do Sinn Féin no good, and I cannot see any good use to which it could be put.

Senator Vincent P. Martin: I remember canvassing in a general election of yesteryear and being challenged by an animated and exercised member of the electorate who said that the Green Party was not a Thirty-two County party. When I replied that we were and that we had councillors and MLAs in the North, I was told that we were not a “true” Thirty-two County party. I decided to tell him that he was right, because we were a global organisation. That is not where it ends. Come the counting of the votes, that person who challenged me and delayed me considerably was a tallyman for a particular political party. Which party it was might not surprise Senators.

It is liberating being the Green Party. I cannot comment with authority north of the Border, but the religion of certain people, including my former party leader, has been brought to my attention over the years in the most unusual circumstances. I was not aware of his religion. As a student of history, I took a certain amount of pleasure in the two democratic bastions of Ireland, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, coming together and burying their differences. It was gigantic and something I did not believe I would see in my lifetime. I remember watching the then Taoiseach and current Tánaiste, Deputy Varadkar, saying on “The Late Late Show” that it would be a great challenge for the Green Party and that, if we wanted to get our green message out to all of rural Ireland, this would be a wonderful moment to bring the two big parties with us, because who better to carry the message for us and take a few bullets for the Green Party along the way? The Green Party voted to go into government.

We talk about the difference between orange and green and the question of how to unite them in peace. Unfortunately, I have seen a different division close up since being elected to the Seanad, that being, the division between green and green, for want of a better term. It is not a policy difference. If we truly want a united Ireland by peaceful means, which I do as a constitutional republican, we will have to get our house in order in the Twenty-six Counties sooner or later. At the moment, it is a divided house. How can we lecture unionists, who are fellow Irish men and women, to coalesce in the North when I sense something that is, at times, little short of extreme dislike in the South? I could have used a stronger term, but let us leave it at that. Sooner or later, there will have to be reconciliation in the South. I am a Border boy and I could talk about the people we lost. I do not want to name anyone in particular in case it does a disservice to the many who fell in that wanton waste of life, but we will eventually have to move on. It will kill us to do so. I understand Senator O’Sullivan’s heartfelt concerns about the past, but when I canvassed during this year’s general election, there were people who did not remember that wanton waste of life or even the Twin Towers. They had not been born then, yet they would be voting in that election.

For the avoidance of any doubt, I concur with the remarks of the Green Party’s Seanad leader, Senator Pauline O’Reilly. Fine Gael has every entitlement to table this motion, but I am concerned about the long-term damage it will cause. We must work better. We must reach out to the other side. John Hume did not have time to help us – he was busy in the Six Counties. He spoke of a country called “Europe” and dealing with commonalities. His message was that, at the end of the day, we were all living in a country called “Europe”.

There were great people like Mr. Austin Currie in the SDLP. They ploughed a lonely furrow at times. They were chased out of certain estates where they were canvassing and were told that they would not be allowed to re-enter, but can we move on from “Brits out, peace in”, please?

I used to see that graffiti.

I also used to see another slogan - “Freedom, Justice, Peace”. However, what we are seeing is not really freedom, justice and peace. I heralded the Good Friday Agreement and thank the many politicians who made it happen, but it has not delivered true normality, the word used by Senator O’Sullivan. We should strive for that in our lifetimes. It will ask much of many, but no more than it asked of Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley when they shook hands. Our journey is less painful than what they had to go through. I will not give anyone a free pass, but everyone in the South of Ireland – the proud Republic of Ireland – will sooner or later have to sit down, work towards a better Ireland for everyone and get our house in order so that we can have a truly shared island, one that I hope will some day be united.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): I thank the Senators who tabled this motion for my daily visit to the Seanad. Before I get to the substantive issue of the motion, I wish to refer to the robust debate we have had. It must be that way sometimes, but I am always impressed by the level of debate in this House.

It is important to point out that, in an era of political online campaigning where politics are increasingly fought in a different arena, financing in our political system has a significant influence on the outcome of elections, referendums and political narratives. It is important that we have this debate this evening.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the debate and I thank Senator Ward for bringing forward this motion, which at its core seeks to strengthen our electoral laws to ensure that donations and resources from non-citizens resident outside the State are not being utilised to influence our elections and political processes. The Government is not opposed to the objectives of the motion and is committed to safeguarding our democratic processes from any undue or hidden influences. I am aware this motion concerns the death of a British citizen in a nursing home in Wales in January 2018 and the donation of significant funds from his considerable estate to the Sinn Féin Party. While I do not wish to comment in any great detail on the specific case, I would like to take the opportunity of the debate to clarify for the House the extent of existing legislative provisions in respect of political spending and donations.

As Senators will be aware, the Electoral Act 1997, as amended, provides the statutory framework for dealing with political donations and sets out the regulatory regime covering a wide range of inter-related issues, such as funding for political parties, reimbursement of election expenses, the establishment of election expenditure limits, the disclosure of election expenditure, the setting of limits of permissible donations, the prohibition of certain donations, the disclosure of donations, and the registration of third parties who accept donations given for political purposes which exceed €100. The Act also provides for the independent supervision of these provisions by the Standards in Public Office Commission, SIPO, which has published a number of detailed guidance documents to inform candidates standing for election, Members of the Oireachtas, Members of the European Parliament, political parties, corporate donors and third parties of their obligations under the Act. A core objective of the Act is to ensure that there is transparency in how our political parties and the wider political system are funded. As all Senators will acknowledge, transparency in political funding is of particular importance during the holding of elections - that point has been well made here this evening - which are at the very heart of our democratic process, to enable the electorate to make informed choices when casting their votes on the one hand and to ensure a level playing field, as mentioned by Senator

McDowell, between candidates and political parties on the other.

It might be useful to recall what is required when a donation is made for political purposes to any person or political party obligated under the Act. As many Senators will be aware, a political donation is broadly defined and is taken to mean any contribution given for political purposes by any person, regardless of whether the person is a member of a political party, to a candidate standing for election, a serving politician, a political party or a third party. Such a donation may include all or any of the following: a donation of money; a donation of property or goods; the free use of property or goods; or the free supply of services; the difference between the usual commercial price and the lower price charged for the purchase, acquisition or use of property or goods or the supply of services where the price, fee or other consideration is less than the usual commercial price; and a contribution made by a person to a fundraising event organised for the purpose of raising funds for a candidate standing for election, a serving politician or a political party. The donation is that proportion of the contribution attributable to the net profit, if any, derived from the event. A donation can also be a payment by a person on his own behalf or on behalf of one person or more than one person of a fee or subscription for membership or continued membership of a political party. Finally, it also includes a donation in kind, that is to say, a person or organisation pays for work or expenses from its own resources outside of party funds. This is considered a donation in kind for the cost of work of the donee. Donations-in-kind or national donations are to be valued at the usual commercial price charged for the purchase, use or acquisition of the property or goods or the supply of services donated.

Where a monetary donation in excess of €100 is received, the recipient must open and maintain an account in a financial institution in the State. Any subsequent monetary donations, irrespective of value, must be lodged to that account. A donation statement must be furnished to SIPO by the deadlines prescribed in the Act. For serving politicians the deadline is by a date not later than 31 January in each year. For political parties the cut-off point is by a date not later than 31 March each year. We are all well familiar with this. A donation statement must show whether a political party received from the same person a donation exceeding €1,500 in the preceding calendar year. The corresponding amount for a candidate standing for election or a serving politician is €600. If a person makes multiple donations to the same political party or a serving politician, the aggregated amount applies. A number of statutory statements and supporting documents must also be submitted to SIPO in support of the transparency measures provided for under the Act.

The Act also prohibits the making or receipt of certain donations, including a donation exceeding the value of €100 if the name and address of the donor is not known; a cash donation exceeding the value of €200; a donation is prohibited from a body corporate or unincorporated body of persons that does not keep an office in the island of Ireland from which one or more of its principal activities is directed; a donation of whatever value from an individual other than an Irish citizen who resides outside the island of Ireland is prohibited; a donation exceeding the value of €200 in any calendar year from a corporate donor is prohibited unless the corporate donor is registered in the register of corporate donors maintained by SIPO and a statement on behalf of the corporate donor confirming that the making of the donation was approved by the corporate donor is furnished with the donation by the donee; or a donation or donations from the same donor in any calendar year exceeding, in the case of a candidate at an election or a serving politician, an aggregate value of €1,000, or in the case of a political party, an accounting unit of a political party, or a third party, an aggregate value of €2,500.

While the Act does not set an overall threshold in the number of donations that may be

received, the amounts that can be received from individual donors are capped at an absolute maximum of €2,500. This is a point of significant difference from the position that applies in Northern Ireland and the wider United Kingdom, where there is no maximum threshold in respect of political donation. As I have already set out, donations from abroad are also prohibited unless made by Irish citizens resident outside the State. In Northern Ireland and the wider United Kingdom, the position of foreign donations is broadly similar to that which applies here in Ireland.

As I have outlined in the House previously, yesterday evening was the most recent occasion, my Department is currently finalising the general scheme of an electoral reform Bill which will establish an independent statutory electoral commission, provide for the modernisation of the election registration process, introduce new regulatory provisions to ensure transparency in on-line paid political advertising, which has been mentioned this evening, and facilitate the holding of electoral events during Covid-19 restrictions. The plans to establish an electoral commission are now at an advanced stage in my Department. In accordance with the commitment in the current programme for Government, *Our Shared Future*, it is intended that an electoral commission will be in place by the end of next year. My Department is working to meet this commitment and is confident that it can be met. With this in mind, the proposed general scheme of an electoral reform Bill will be brought to Government shortly for consideration.

It is envisaged that one of the initial functions assigned to an electoral commission following its establishment will be a policy research and advisory function, which will inform and advise the Government and the Oireachtas in the consideration of reform to our electoral laws. In this context, Senators may recall that the programme for Government commits the electoral commission, when established, to undertake a number of items of research, such as the use of posters at elections and referendums as well as the expansion of postal voting provisions.

6 o'clock
In addition, the Government is of the view that a comprehensive review of the Electoral Act 1997 is required and that the proposed electoral commission, once established, would be best placed to undertake such a review in an objective and independent manner. The purpose of the review is, in the first instance, to progress the commitment in the programme for Government to review current electoral laws and the conduct of politics in Ireland to ensure that donations and resources from non-citizens outside the State are not being utilised to influence our elections and political processes. We will legislate to prevent this if necessary. These are matters that are directly relevant to all political donation regimes as provided for in the Act. The review would inform the further transfer of functions to the electoral commission.

In accordance with international best practice and the recommendations of the former Oireachtas Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht in its report on the establishment of electoral commission, published in January 2016, it is proposed that the commission would have a limited set of functions during its initial set-up period. Nevertheless, it is intended that additional electoral functions will transfer into the commission as its capacity and experience builds over time.

Some of the functions recommended for a later transfer by the aforesaid Oireachtas committee are those associated with political donations and electoral expenditure regimes as provided for in the Electoral Act.

Thirdly and finally, the review will assist in addressing a number of broader issues that have been raised in connection with the Act. This will include, for example: the concerns of

civil society around the definition of “political purposes” which was debated in this House only last month by way of a Bill brought forward by Senator Ruane; the duration of election spending periods; the definition of a candidate; spending limits at referendums; and political party accounts for small Exchequer-funded parties. These are all issues which deserve careful consideration. Against the broad range of issues involved, as well as the complex and integrated nature of their interactions under the Electoral Act, it is considered that a comprehensive review of the Act in its entirety would deliver a better and more efficient outcome than a focus on foreign donations only, or a series of separate reviews on each of the individual issues just mentioned. Ultimately, it is envisaged that the proposed review by the electoral commission would deliver a wide range of recommendations which would aim, among other matters, to strengthen our electoral laws and to ensure that political donations and resources from non-citizens resident outside the State are not being used to influence our electoral and democratic processes. It is envisaged that the proposed review would be completed within a relatively short timeframe following the commission’s establishment.

In conclusion, the motion before us today seeks to address issues that are both complex and integral to maintaining transparency for our political donations regime and ensuring the integrity of our elections remain fair and free from any foreign or hidden influence. In this regard, the Government is committed to a full and comprehensive review of the Electoral Act 1997 by the electoral commission with a view to ensuring the necessary provisions are in place to prevent any undue influence on our political and democratic processes that may arise from the use of foreign donations and resources during and outside electoral periods.

Senator Barry Ward: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire Stáit as ucht a chúpla focal agus as ucht an tacaíocht don rún freisin. In bringing this motion before the House I sought to raise an issue that needs to be addressed by this House.

I agree with Members who expressed regret that we have used our Private Members’ time to do this. I agree that it is regrettable that we have had to do it. I sought to do so on a party-to-party basis which is why this is being brought by the Fine Gael group. I did not seek to make it personal. I regret that Senator Ó Donnghaile did. He will, however, be pleased to know that the army of “shinnerbots”, as we refer to them, the hordes of people who are online and constantly attack anybody who espouses a view contrary to Sinn Féin’s credo, have been very active. By the time I sat down there were many alerts on my phone which were a prelude to what he had to say himself. The confluence of words that were used by Senator Ó Donnghaile and the ones used online is perhaps a coincidence, but it is striking. Of course, they were also attacking me in respect of the issue that Senator Ó Donnghaile raised in his contribution about a complaint that was made about me to the Standards in Public Office Commission in 2010 or 2011. I thought it was somewhat cowardly of Senator Ó Donnghaile to essentially pose the question to me and then suggest that I was unable or unwilling in some way to answer it. I can assure the House that I do not have to answer it because the 2012 annual report of the Standards in Public Office Commission, on pages 22 and 23 if the Senator wishes to know, specifically exonerates me of any wrongdoing in respect of that matter. SIPO said there was no basis on which to pursue the matter. It wrote to the then Minister about it and concluded with the comment that there was a legal basis for what happened. I do not have anything to hide and like Senator McDowell, I am all about transparency. That appears to be at variance with the views of the Sinn Féin Members of this House, or should I say the Sinn Féin Member of this House, because only a single Senator from Sinn Féin has turned up to address this issue.

This is an issue and is something we should discuss. I believe it is something that almost all

of us agree on because everybody in this House appears to agree that there must be transparency in political funding, that there must be an opportunity for the Standards in Public Office Commission to verify that all parties in this country, all parties in these Houses, are abiding by the same set of rules. Sinn Féin does not agree with that. Sinn Féin essentially puts itself beyond regulation in the attitude with which it approaches this donation which is an eye-wateringly large amount of money by anybody's standards. It is an amount of money that would require 1,600 ordinary donors to any other party in this House. Sinn Féin deems itself beyond regulation – it does not need to comply with the rules of this State, it can go beyond that and through a sleight of hand, deem itself to be, for the purposes of this donation, a six-county party and a 26-county party.

There are serious questions to be answered on this in circumstances where, I think, every other party in this House struggles to fund its activities. I can tell the House that Fine Gael Deputies, Senators, councillors and activists throughout the country are currently desperately trying to sell tickets for the one opportunity we are going to have to raise funds this year. Fine Gael will beg, borrow and steal – from its members of course, not in any nefarious way - to fund its activities in the next election. In fact it will borrow to do that, hoping to be able to recoup that money in the following years by fundraising from its members and its supporters. That is the way we all operate but Sinn Féin seems to think it does not have to operate that way. It has already been said by other Members that it is the wealthiest party in this State by some distance. It is blessed with massive sets of assets and massive cash reserves. I suspect they are what fund the kinds of activities I referred to at the beginning of this debate.

Without wishing to draw the matter out any further, there are, as I have said, serious questions to be answered here. What is perhaps most remarkable about the contribution from the single Sinn Féin Member who attended this debate is that none of those questions was answered. No explanation has been given and no assurance has been given. Therefore, at the end of this debate we remain in the same position as the Standards in Public Office Commission, in that we do not know and have been given no assurance that this enormous amount of money which is coming into Sinn Féin's coffers will not be used to compete with Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, the Labour Party, the Green Party and all of the other parties that make up the Houses of the Oireachtas. We do not have any of those assurances because they cannot be given. As was said by Senator Seery Kearney, this is particularly the case in the realm of social media and online content which we cannot control. That is the reality and it is on that basis I commend the motion to the House. I hope Senators will support it.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: A point of order, A Chathaoirligh.

An Cathaoirleach: I have got to tell you-----

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I do not think you can refuse me a point of order, A Chathaoirligh.

An Cathaoirleach: No, I cannot.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: You might direct me. Just to keep the record accurate, I would like it if you could inform the House that, under the current restrictions, Sinn Féin is only allowed one seat in this Chamber for debates and that is why there is one Senator here.

An Cathaoirleach: In accordance with the agreements of the Committee on Procedure and Privileges, the seating allocation was one seat for Sinn Féin, two for the Labour Party, two for

Independents, one for the Civil Engagement Group and then the Government parties. That is the current arrangement and is a point of order.

Question put.

An Cathaoirleach: As no tellers have been nominated on the Níl side the division cannot proceed and I declare the question carried.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: May I clarify the situation, a Chathaoirligh. My understanding was, and I was informed, that tellers would not be instructed from either side regarding this vote. It was on that basis that I agreed not to appoint tellers because the voice vote was sufficient. However, if tellers were appointed for one side of the vote that is not what I was informed. I do not want to be problematic. I entered into that in good faith. That was not my understanding.

An Cathaoirleach: I am not going to stop anyone appointing tellers. I am informed that the tellers were appointed by the Tá side. If the Níl side wants to appoint tellers we can do so.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I wanted to make that point for the purposes of the record. I have a further point I wish to make which I think is important for the purposes of the record. During the course of the debate Senator Ward advised the----

An Cathaoirleach: No that is not a point of order. We are on the procedure.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I think it is important for the purposes of the record.

(Interruptions).

An Cathaoirleach: Sorry.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: The record might need to be corrected. That is why this is a point of order.

An Cathaoirleach: That is a different issue. A point of order should be on the procedure in front of us. Tellers have been appointed for the Tá side. If no tellers are appointed by the Níl side, and I will allow tellers to be appointed, then the motion will be carried.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I nominate myself and Senator Gavan as tellers.

Question again put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 31; Níl, 4.	
Tá	Níl
Ahearn, Garret.	Boylan, Lynn.
Blaney, Niall.	Gavan, Paul.
Byrne, Malcolm.	Ó Donnghaile, Niall.
Carrigy, Micheál.	Warfield, Fintan.
Casey, Pat.	
Cassells, Shane.	
Clifford-Lee, Lorraine.	
Conway, Martin.	

Seanad Éireann

Currie, Emer.	
Daly, Paul.	
Dolan, Aisling.	
Dooley, Timmy.	
Fitzpatrick, Mary.	
Gallagher, Robbie.	
Garvey, Róisín.	
Keogan, Sharon.	
Kyne, Seán.	
Lombard, Tim.	
Martin, Vincent P.	
McDowell, Michael.	
McGahon, John.	
McGreehan, Erin.	
Moynihan, Rebecca.	
O'Loughlin, Fiona.	
O'Reilly, Joe.	
O'Reilly, Pauline.	
O'Sullivan, Ned.	
Seery Kearney, Mary.	
Sherlock, Marie.	
Ward, Barry.	
Wilson, Diarmuid.	

Tellers: Tá, Senators Robbie Gallagher and Seán Kyne; Níl, Senators Niall Ó Donnghaile and Paul Gavan.

Question declared carried.

An Cathaoirleach: In accordance with the order of today, the House stands adjourned until 10.30 a.m. on Tuesday, 17 November 2020.

The Seanad adjourned at 6.28 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Tuesday, 17 November 2020.