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DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—Neamhcheartaithe
(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

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SEANAD ÉIREANN

Déardaoín, 1 Deireadh Fómhair 2026

Thursday, 1 October 2026

Chuaigh an Leas-Chathaoirleach i gceannas ar 9.30 a.m.

Machnamh agus Paidir.

Prayer and Reflection.

Teachtaireacht ón Dáil - Message from Dáil

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Dáil Éireann passed the Industrial Development (Amendment) and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2026 on 30 September 2026, to which the agreement of Seanad Éireann is desired.

Gnó an tSeanaid - Business of Seanad

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I have received notice from the following Senators that they propose to raise the following matters on the commencement of the Seanad:

Senator Manus Boyle - The need for the Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation to make a statement on the minor flood mitigation works and coastal protection scheme, in particular the protection works in Inver, County Donegal and flood protection measures in Killybegs, County Donegal.

Senator Cathal Byrne - The need for the Minister for Transport to provide an update on the payment of "catch-up" roads funding due in County Wexford.

Senator Margaret Murphy O'Mahony - The need for the Minister for Education and Youth to make a statement on a return to the traditional back to school dates in September due to the impact that the earlier return is having on the tourism sector.

Senator Evanne Ní Chuilinn - The need for the Minister for Education and Youth to make a statement on youth service funding parameters and their application in Dublin's south-west inner city.

Senator Eileen Lynch - The need for the Minister for Transport to make a statement on funding for the Charleville ring road-relief road and interim road safety and traffic management measures at Charleville, County Cork.

The matters raised by the Senators are suitable for discussion and I have selected Senators Manus Boyle, Cathal Byrne, Margaret Murphy O'Mahony and Evanne Ní Chuilinn, and they will be taken now.

Senator Eileen Lynch may give notice on another day of the matter that she wishes to raise.

Flood Prevention Measures

Senator Manus Boyle: I want to raise two important issues of which the Minister of State, Deputy Moran, is very aware, namely, flood protection on Bridge Street in Killybegs and Inver, both of which he visited. These are major issues for people living in those communities. It is about homes, businesses, livelihoods and people's sense of security. The erosion at Inver is an immediate and ongoing concern for these residents. The Office of Public Works, OPW, previously provided funding for coastal protection works, including €54,000 in funding for the Inver project. Donegal County Council has been charged with progressing the works along with the OPW. I want to establish where these works stand. Residents have been living in fear after major storms, and very high tides could cause further damage.

We know that the coastal landscape is changing. There is a national challenge. The Government has recognised that rising sea levels and storm surges constitute a major problem and the OPW has been given the co-ordination role of assessing these risks. The national strategy is important for the people of Inver but what they really want to know is when the works will be on the ground. I, therefore, ask the Minister of State for a clear update on the Inver project. What is the current status of the work? When can we expect the timeframe for commencement? Can the Minister of State give me some clarity today so that I can go home and reassure these people? The Minister of State gave a guarantee that this work would be done long ago but it still has not been done and the people there are living in fear.

I believe the Minister of State visited Bridge Street in Killybegs twice and spoke to the people there. On 23 and 24 November 2024, days that will live in my memory, I got a phone call at 5.30 a.m. that Bridge Street was flooded. I immediately went there and but for the quick thinking of the residents, a lot more damage could have been done. Sixteen houses and nine businesses were affected. The impact on businesses was enormous. Following that, the OPW and Donegal County Council agreed a pilot project of flood relief measures. These included channel clearance, drainage work, assessments of drainage networks, a non-return valve and a review of the hydrology data so that the November 2024 flood event would inform future designs. There was serious rainfall surrounding Killybegs on 27 August. That night, the people in Bridge Street were up in arms. The phone never stopped ringing. They thought they were going to be in the eye of the storm again but, thankfully, it abated and there was no problem on Bridge Street.

We want to know what works have been done but what the people really want to know is what is happening next. When can the residents go to bed and sleep easy if there is a yellow weather warning? We seem to be stuck with one hand not knowing what the other is doing. We need clarity today for the residents of Bridge Street and to tell them what will be done so that they can rest easy when they go to their beds at night when there are severe rainstorms.

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): As the Senator knows, I am very familiar with flood and coastal erosion risks across Donegal, having visited the county in February this year. Coastal erosion and localised flooding issues are matters in the first instance for each local authority to investigate and address. Each local authority may carry out flood mitigation and coastal erosion works using its own resources or it may apply to the OPW for funding under the minor flood mitigation works and coastal protection scheme.

Since its introduction in 2009, some €70 million has been approved under the scheme. Of this, the OPW has approved €2.4 million in funding to Donegal County Council for 45 projects. In May 2026, I announced the revised criteria for the minor works scheme. The revisions include an increase in the upper threshold in funding for projects from €750,000 to €2 million and an increase in the OPW contribution from 90% to 95% for approved funding above €300,000.

The Government recognises the risks associated with climate change and that increases in sea levels and storm surges will result in increased frequency of coastal erosion.

In response to these challenges, the recommendations outlined in the report of the interdepartmental group on national coastal change management strategy are being implemented. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage holds the lead co-ordination role and is responsible for chairing an interdepartmental steering group on coastal change management. The OPW has been designated by the Government as the national lead co-ordinating body for the assessment of coastal change hazards and risks and the assessment of technical options and constraints.

I saw first hand the coastal erosion risks at Inver earlier this year when I met the local community on site. To date, the OPW has approved €112,500 for four projects in Inver to manage the erosion risk. Donegal County Council has proposed works to the existing sea wall at Inver that include the construction of a row of rock armour along a line of existing gabions to provide protection from further damage. Today, I am approving a further €12,668 in additional funding sought this week by Donegal County Council to enable the delivery of these important works. This brings the total amount of OPW funding for this project to €62,668.

The OPW's catchment flood risk assessment and management, CFRAM, programme identified Killybegs as a community that required a flood relief scheme. Under the national programme, work is under way on some 100 flood relief schemes identified through the flood risk management plans. As is common in many areas, sourcing the specialised engineering skills needed for these projects is challenging. As such, it is not feasible to deliver all the flood relief schemes concurrently and the programme has been subdivided into two tranches, focusing initially on the first tranche of flood relief schemes.

The revision to the OPW minor works scheme that I announced in May allows local authorities to introduce interim measures in communities like Killybegs, pending the completion of a scheme for the town. When I met with the council and the local community in February, I asked the council to bring forward proposals for interim measures. The council is working on advanced measures to deliver flood protection, particularly for the Bridge Street area, in the aftermath of the flooding that occurred in November 2024. Costings are currently being developed that, if acceptable, will enable the progression of a design to mitigate the flood

risk to Bridge Street. I have asked my officials to engage with the local authority on these proposed solutions.

Senator Manus Boyle: I thank the Minister of State. I note that he has approved another €12,000 for Inver and I am very thankful to him for doing that. When he was in Inver that day, he saw the pain on people's faces and he listened to them. He told me before he left that evening that he would try to sort this for me and I really appreciate it. We need to get this worked on now. There was a good summer there and we could have had it all done but it did not happen. I ask the Minister of State to keep the hammer on people so that we get this done as soon as possible. I went down there a couple of weeks ago for a walk and the erosion is getting worse. We really need to get this work done as soon as possible.

The same is true for Killybegs; the Minister of State feels the pain of its people, too. He has been there twice. Before my time, the Minister of State visited Killybegs and he is held in very high esteem there. He said he would get it sorted. I urge him to push Killybegs on, too. These people have dealt with this on two occasions, as can be seen from the footage. The Minister of State comes from a place that was damaged and he knows what it is like to see the water coming down and going into people's houses. It really destroys them and it takes them a long time to get back to normal. These people are living in fear. On 27 September, there was a flash flood and the phone was ringing right away, with people asking if they would get sandbags even though the flood was a couple of miles away from the town. They are so anxious and afraid of something happening again. I ask the Minister of State to push Killybegs on, too.

Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran: I thank the Senator and he is right. Only a few months ago, I was here in the Seanad giving an update on flooding throughout the whole country. I heard the pain from every Senator who spoke in relation to that and on that basis, I made changes to the minor works scheme. Senators, no more than TDs, need to go to the local authorities and work with them to drive on the schemes. The money is there. I made the changes to allow them to deliver on the schemes.

Regarding Inver, my people have been engaging with the people I met that day and, in particular, with the local authority. They are all ready to go and start that project. There was a shortfall in the funding but I made that money available today.

On Killybegs, I feel the pain of people up and down the country but especially in Killybegs. I danced with the people on the street that day and I gave a firm commitment. On that firm commitment, my people, following Senator Boyle's request a week and a half ago, have engaged with the local authority. I make no bones about the fact that I have no sympathy for any local authority because the money is there. I want it to come in for the scheme. In the case of Killybegs, and to be fair to the local authority, it is working on a design solution and said it would be back to my Department in the next couple of weeks. Senator Boyle says that we had a fine summer but there is only a certain window in which we can do this work. That window has now started, so I would like to see Inver and Killybegs progressing. When Killybegs flooded in 2024, the Senator came to me and I secured and provided funding. I will do the same in relation to the middle of the town as well. I gave a commitment to the people and to Senator Boyle and I want to deliver on that.

Road Projects

Senator Cathal Byrne: I thank the Minister of State for coming to the Chamber this morning to take this very important Commencement matter. This is a pretty straightforward topic. The programme for Government commits to funding a matching road maintenance catch-up programme for local authorities with poor pavement surface conditions. Of the approximately 3,000 km of local roads that Wexford has at the moment, there are many roads that are in need of significant repairs. I ask the Minister of State for an update on the Government's catch-up roads maintenance fund. I am very much aware of the €23.3 million that was allocated to Wexford County Council to fix local and regional roads, as well as the €13.49 million that was allocated to us following Storm Chandra and the devastating damage it caused at the beginning of this year. This question specifically relates to the catch-up funding to bridge the gap and address the enormous issues that we have had across County Wexford with our local and regional road network.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Youth (Deputy Michael Moynihan): I thank the Senator for his question, which I am answering on behalf of the Minister for Transport. I will begin by providing a brief outline of the issues. The local authorities are the bodies responsible, under statute, for the maintenance and improvement of local and regional roads. There has been huge investment in local and regional roads over the last while. In 2026, €718 million was made available, which facilitated an increase of €26 million for road protection and renewal throughout Ireland. While there has been an increase in funding, the challenge with local and regional roads is that we are constantly playing catch-up, to be honest about it.

The Senator spoke about recent storms and the damage that had been done. The Government made extra funding of more than €13 million available to Wexford County Council to deal with those issues. The challenge we have is to make sure enough funding is being made available by the State. It is an issue that has been raised right across the country but particularly in Wexford. I am not going to go through the formal answer provided but I take very seriously the question the Senator has asked. I take the issues in Wexford very seriously, particularly those relating to the damage caused by the storm. A lot of the time when there is a very severe storm, there is an initial assessment of the damage done and a request for extra money but it is only when the roads are being repaired that we see the absolute damage and understand the actual amount of funding that is needed. I propose to take the question that the Senator has asked back to the Department. The response sets out the increases in funding.

We are in budget negotiations between the Department of Transport and the Department of public expenditure but those points are being hammered out over the next while. It is important that we understand that local and regional roads play a vital part in the lives and livelihoods of many people across rural Ireland, and in County Wexford in particular. It is important we understand what the need is for the local authorities, that we match that need, and that there is full engagement not just from the Departments of Transport and public expenditure but also with resources from within the local authorities. I will bring those matters to the Department of Transport and ensure that they receive the attention they deserve.

Senator Cathal Byrne: I thank the Minister of State. I think the main issue here is that the programme for Government commitment has created an expectation that there will be additional once-off funding to bridge the gap between where our roads are and where they ought to be. There is a growing sense of frustration among county councillors and Wexford County Council, as with many local authorities up and down the country, who want a clear timeline for when this catch-up funding will be made available. I appreciate the fact that the Minister of State will bring it back to the Government in the context of the budget taking place next Tuesday and, hopefully, that might yield some good news for us.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I thank the Senator. In the programme for Government, there was a clear commitment and an understanding on the amount of funding that would have to be put in place, particularly for local and regional roads across the country. That funding would have to increase to meet the demands and challenges being met right across many of our communities. The Senator quite rightly raised the issue in relation to County Wexford. I certainly will. I travel many of the local and regional roads on a daily basis and understand the challenges that are there. I also understand the huge volume of traffic on our roads now. Sometimes I marvel that some of the roads and bridges built centuries ago are taking the current traffic levels. That being said, there is a commitment in the programme for Government and I certainly will advocate to my colleagues in the Department of Transport and across wider government in relation to the points the Senator has made.

Schools Administration

Senator Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire Stáit. I thank the Cathaoirleach for choosing my Commencement matter this morning. The Minister of State is around the same go as myself, age wise, and I have no doubt he remembers that we used to return to school on 1 September every single year. When you got your summer holidays, you knew you were coming back on 1 September. That was the case up to fairly recently - maybe 12 or 13 years ago. I think it makes great sense that people know when they are getting their holidays that they will be returning on 1 September. I think it makes it easier for planning schedules, staff, special needs assistants, SNAs, etc.

There is a big thing affected by schools opening early. As for what I mean by "early", it started with schools being called back at the end of August but it is now very often the middle of August when they return. People just do not return on a whim; obviously, there is a lot of preparation and a lot of psyching up for students, etc. In essence, by it not being 1 September, August is, more or less, ruled out. This is having a detrimental effect, especially on tourism areas. I come from an area with a very high dependency on tourism, and speaking to people involved in the industry, they say that August is now a write-off. That is an awful pity. They are now very dependent on the month of July, which is obviously not enough for them to make a living.

I know it is up to each school and that every school has to clock in the same number of days but I would like the Department to look at this and bring it back in order that unless it is a Saturday or a Sunday, every school returns on 1 September. If it is a Saturday or Sunday, it should go to the Monday. This is just so the tourism industry can be looked after and schools can plan better.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Malcolm Noonan): The Aire Stáit might get the all-Ireland back in September as well.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I am not sure setting the date for the all-Ireland is something I can do. I thank Senator Murphy O'Mahony for the question and the issues she has raised. One thing we always looked forward to was when the Saturday or Sunday was 1 September; we actually thought we were gaining. I remember one particular September when 1 September was a Thursday, and I had banked that they would not bring us back until the following Monday. I remember my mother coming from first mass and saying that she had great news: the school is opening on Thursday. It is indelibly inked in my brain; we were gambling on an extra few days.

On 1 September being the date, I will outline for the House the issues on returning to school from our Department's point of view. Every three years, the scheduling of school holiday periods during the school year is reviewed and agreed at the Teachers Conciliation Council. The purpose of standardising the breaks at Christmas, Easter and mid-term is to avoid problems for families caused by variations in closure arrangements where children are attending different schools. A number of factors are taken into account in agreeing on the scheduling of school holiday periods, including the fact that schools must be open for a minimum of 166 days at the post-primary level and 182 days at the primary level, as well as the commencement date of the State examinations. The arrangements in relation to the standardising of the school year do not require that the start of the school year be standardised. Individual schools may, therefore, determine the precise start and end of the school year, subject to ensuring that requirements are met in respect of the minimum number of days per school.

The expectation is that the school would normally commence in the week in which 1 September falls. However, schools may commence a week prior to that in which 1 September falls where it would otherwise not be practical for the school to meet the overall requirement of a minimum of 166 days at post-primary and 182 days at primary level. In such cases, the school should ensure that the date of commencement is as close as possible to 1 September. In this regard, schools provide a calendar for parents at the beginning of the school year, which includes details of the school holiday dates.

The last review of the school holiday period took place earlier this year, when an agreement was reached between the managerial authorities of the schools, the teachers' unions, the Department of Education and Youth and the Department of public expenditure under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council. The current arrangements are set out in Circular 18/2026. This circular covers the three school years from 2026-27 to 2028-29, and commits the parties at the Teachers Conciliation Council to review the current arrangements in the autumn of 2028.

To take the Senator's point, the managerial bodies and the education partners will come together to review it. I know that the post-primary schools started a little bit later this year because the State examinations - the leaving certificate and junior certificate - started the first Wednesday of June. That was later this year because of the way 1 June came and this gave a start date later into August. However, sometimes the first Wednesday in June could be very early in June, depending on the way the week falls, and that would then push it back earlier in August.

The school holiday experience for children and families is very important for the kids. The Senator mentioned the hospitality industry, which is another factor to take into account. I think it is vitally important that we keep 1 September as that date. I certainly will bring the points the Senator made into the next review and to the attention of those right across the Department. My opinion is that we should have it as close as possible to 1 September.

Senator Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: I thank the Minister of State for his reply. I acknowledge that the review was done and agreed to but again, going back to what I said, I think 1 September is ideal not only for the children and the school but also for the local economy from where the children come.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: There have been a lot of changes to the school year. There was a standardisation of the holidays at Easter and Christmas and for the breaks in November and February. It is one important piece that we have to look at in the round. The schools do not just operate as an educational institution. Children going to school is a vital fabric of our national story. That all blends into the hospitality industry as well when kids are off and so forth. It is important. The point the Senator was making at the early part of her contribution is that a lot of parents are getting themselves ready to send the kids back to school in the month of August. The expenditure part in that regard is not lost on me. The fundamental point is that we need to allow the holidays to be as long as possible and that 1 September is one of those dates. The review has happened to date but the point the Senator has made is not lost on me. It will certainly be documented for any further consideration of that at Department level with the education partners and it will form part of that discussion.

Departmental Funding

Senator Evanne Ní Chuilinn: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire Stáit as ucht a bheith i Seanad Éireann inniu chun infheistíocht i seirbhísí don aos óg a phlé liom. I raise the urgent need for additional investment in youth services in Dublin's south-west inner city, SWIC. Securing greater investment for this area is one of my key priorities. Over recent months, I have engaged with local community organisations, residents, schools, sports clubs and other stakeholders about their vision for the future of the south-west inner city. One issue comes up time and again, which is the need for greater investment in youth work and recreational opportunities for young people.

There are many excellent youth work providers working in the SWIC, but today I will highlight what appears to be a significant disparity in youth work funding, particularly in relation to the Solas Project and its Liberate youth work team. Before turning to the Solas Project specifically, it is important that we set out the context of all of this. Earlier this year, Dr. Barra Roantree published an independent socioeconomic analysis of the south-west inner city. The findings were stark. The crime rate is more than twice the national average. Third level progression rates are less than half the national average. The rate of single-parent families is twice the national average. Only two of Dublin City Council's 248 public pitches are located in the south-west inner city. Just 22% of primary school pupils and 8% of secondary school pupils meet the national physical activity guidelines. Most strikingly, half of those living in a deprived area of Dublin's inner city live in the south-west inner city, despite the area accounting

for only a quarter of the inner city population. They are not just statistics; they reflect the daily reality facing many young people in the SWIC and demonstrate the need for a co-ordinated package of supports across youth services, education, sport, health and justice.

Against that backdrop, organisations such as the Solas Project play a vital role. The Liberate youth work team operates in a catchment area with a youth population of more than 4,100 people between the ages of ten and 24. According to the Pobal deprivation index, four of the eight most disadvantaged small areas in Dublin's inner city are located within that catchment area, yet Liberate is currently operating at around 30% above its funded capacity. It works directly with 115 young people, while a further 135 remain on a waiting list. Among those waiting are 16 young people at risk of early school-leaving, 25 at risk of involvement in crime, drug dealing and antisocial behaviour and six who are actively being groomed into criminal activity. Many fall into what Dublin city youth services define as target 4 group, that is, young people who are hardest to reach and most at risk of involvement in gang-related activity, crime and antisocial behaviour. These young people cannot afford to wait until they reach crisis point before supports become available. Early intervention is exactly what youth work is supposed to provide.

In 2024, the Solas Project worked with more than 250 young people. However, funding constraints have forced the organisation to reduce aspects of its service to maintain the quality of support it provides. As a result, a service operating in one of the most disadvantaged communities in the State cannot meet the demand that exists on its doorstep. What makes this particularly frustrating is that the need is so clearly evidenced.

I want to be clear - it is not about setting one youth work group against another. I would welcome clarification on the criteria used to allocate youth work funding and how disparities such as this can arise. I hope that next week's budget will deliver increased investment in youth services across the country, particularly for communities such as the south-west inner city. We have seen what happens when young people do not have somewhere to go to and do not have those supports locally. We need to positively discriminate against youth work services like the Solas Project and the Liberate team in the south-west inner city.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I thank Senator Ní Chuilinn for raising this issue. I am taking this matter because youth work falls under the Department of education. I am taking it on behalf of the Minister, Deputy Hildegard Naughton.

The Department is dedicated to enhancing the delivery of youth work services and opportunities for young people across the country. UBU Your Place Your Space is the largest youth service scheme funded by the Department. It targets young people between the ages of ten and 24 who are identified as marginalised, vulnerable and at risk of not flourishing. The Department has provided funding to 258 targeted youth services across the 16 ETB areas this year. The ETBs co-ordinate the delivery of the funding to the services in their local area. Over €54 million has been allocated to the UBU scheme in 2026. This year's allocation brings on an increase of over €10 million or 24% on the period between 2021 and 2025.

In relation to the Solas Project, the allocation has increased each year since the entry to the UBU scheme in 2021 and by over €40,000 over the last two years. This allocation is over €375,000. The Department and the ETBs work closely in relation to these youth projects. The Senator has identified a number of people who are in vulnerable positions. These are targeted

measures to try to ensure that we are getting funding to people who are vulnerable and provide wraparound services to make sure that children and young people are moved away from antisocial behaviour or a life of crime. That is where they are targeted to. We are in ongoing discussions across Government and within our Department in relation to funding. It is not for me to comment on where that lands over the next four or five days but the points the Senator has raised with me are not lost on me. I have seen some fantastic work being done by youth services and ETBs, funded by the Department over the last while. Building on those successes, we have to make sure that we are increasing the funding and that we are making sure that there is funding available for the most vulnerable people.

The Senator raised one or two specific pieces in her opening remarks that I would appreciate getting sight of in order that I could follow up on and have a full understanding of it both from my side and the Minister, Deputy Naughton's side. My reply is on the record, but it is something that the Government and the Department are very conscious of, and we want to make sure that we are doing more in that space. Every cent invested in youth services and moving people away from antisocial behaviour and crime is a huge benefit to them, their families and the State in the long run.

Senator Evanne Ní Chuilinn: I appreciate the sentiment coming from the Department. The Minister of State mentioned the UBU-funded projects. It is difficult to reconcile because there is some data there that suggests the Solas Project is among the lowest funded services relative to its size. Based on 2024 figures, 21 projects received a higher level of funding when measured against service size, with differences ranging from €2,000 to €23,000 per staff. The Minister of State mentioned data. We have data. The Pobal deprivation index that I mentioned earlier is telling us what is going on in that part of the city. Pobal is used over and over again to justify DEIS plus decisions, for example. I think the data is there and could be scrutinised a little more to look at what needs to happen in these parts of our cities.

A mother from the Oliver Bond flats told me that young people are actively going out and committing small crimes to get a JLO so that they can get into some of the youth justice programmes. That is not a preventative model. We need to be accessing those young people before they are in the youth justice model and getting them into the youth projects such as the Solas Project. We should not have a situation whereby young people feel that the only way to get some sort of support in the community is to have a JLO to get access to a youth justice programme.

I want to point out that these parts of our cities, and particularly this part of Dublin city, are falling behind in all the progress we were making socially in every other part of the country. We have seen young people getting involved in some of that dangerous driving and other activities as well. We need to access those young people before things get worse.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: There is great work going on but the challenge the Senator presented where people are committing crime just to get on a system is not right and proper. That is not what we are building the youth services or indeed SOLAS or the UBU for. We will reflect very carefully on the evidence the Senator has just shared with me.

The officials in the Department have gone out and reached all the ETBs involved in youth services over the last while to get a sense of where things are at. Obviously, some of the most challenging are in some of the inner-city areas. We are very mindful of that.

Every young person who is directed away from a life of antisocial behaviour and crime is a win for that young person, for their families and for us all in the long run. We have to invest in a targeted way to make sure the funding is reaching the most vulnerable people. I take the points the Senator raised and we will reflect very carefully on it both at Department level and ETB level as well.

Cuireadh an Seanad ar fionraí ar 10.12 a.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 10.30 a.m.

Sitting suspended at 10.12 a.m. and resumed at 10.30 a.m.

Gnó an tSeanaid - Business of Seanad

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: It is my pleasure to welcome H.E. David Gill to the Distinguished Visitors Gallery. Germany's Unity Day commemorates the reunification of Germany on 3 October 1990 when the former German Democratic Republic joined the Federal Republic of Germany, creating a single German state for the first time since 1945. The ambassador is joined by his colleague from the embassy. I apologise; I do not have their name. He is also joined by Deputy Jen Cummins, who I think is the convenor of the group. You are very welcome.

The links between Ireland and Germany stretch back to the 7th century when Irish missionary monks travelled to German-speaking lands to spread Christianity. Among them was St. Kilian, who became the patron saint of Würzburg and the Apostle of Franconia, helping to forge enduring ties between our two countries. Those connections remain strong today. There is a vibrant German community in Ireland. Germany is twinned with Limerick for the European Presidency. I am delighted the ambassador has visited Limerick so many times. I am sure he will be there many times again. Many Irish people have also made Germany their home.

Irish culture also has a visible presence across Germany through 12 GAA clubs and a range of academic and cultural initiatives that continue to strengthen links between our two countries. Ireland and Germany enjoy a close partnership based on shared European values and priorities. Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union presents a valuable opportunity to further strengthen that co-operation.

Economic relations between our countries continue to flourish. Germany is Ireland's third-largest trading partner globally and our largest within the European Union. Irish companies employ more than 40,000 people in Germany, while German companies support almost 15,000 jobs in Ireland. I extend my best wishes to ambassador Gill and all at the German embassy, to the German community in Ireland and to German people around the world as they celebrate Unity Day. I hope you have a good day and the celebration goes well. I thank them for being here.

An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: I add my voice to the welcome for ambassador Gill. I have had the opportunity to welcome him to Newbridge, which has been twinned with Bad Lippspringe for 29 years now. The ambassador has been a frequent visitor and indeed came for the Manley Hopkins festival this year. It is always a pleasure to see him in Newbridge, in Kildare and here in the Seanad.

The Order of Business is No. 1, motion regarding the arrangements for the sitting of the House on Tuesday, 6 October 2026; Wednesday, 7 October 2026; and Thursday, 8 October 2026, to be taken on the conclusion of the Order of Business without debate; No. 2, motion regarding report of the Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence entitled "First Interim Report", to be taken on the conclusion of No. 1 without debate; and No. 3, motion regarding the report of the Joint Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport entitled "Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the Revised General Scheme of the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill", to be taken on the conclusion of No. 2 without debate.

Senator Mary Fitzpatrick: I would also like to welcome the ambassador and embassy staff and congratulate Germany on its successful reunification. It was important not just for Germany but for all of Europe and the world. I wish *herzlichen Glückwunsch an alle Deutsche in Irland*.

This week we had some very sad news. A colleague of the Houses, Seamus Carroll, passed away very unexpectedly. I would like to offer our sincerest condolences to his colleagues, his friends and his family. He leaves behind a wife, a son and a daughter. I send our deepest condolences to Treasa, Cillian and Aisling. Seamus was a very familiar face to all of us. He was always courteous, accommodating and polite. He was always welcoming to us, our visitors and anybody we brought to the Houses. It is a great privilege for us to serve here but we only do it with the support of those who work with us. I offer deepest condolences to Seamus's family, colleagues and friends. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

I am really concerned about the complete lack of safety and, I believe, the lack of seriousness regarding the safety of our public representatives and their families. I have heard the Leader speak about this and I am sure other Members of the House have as well. This is an issue many of us have raised but the Association of Irish Local Government, AILG, captured it most recently in a report. It did a survey and found that over 63% of councillors who responded had experienced threats, intimidation and harassment. More than half had considered leaving their role because of the threats and harassment. In July, up to 70 female councillors had reported harassment. The problem is that the safety of public representatives and their families is not being taken seriously. That is the sad reality. Our democracy is based on people willing to show up, stand up and speak up. Decisions are made by those who do that but people are being harassed and intimidated. Our democracy depends on strong public representation at a local level. I acknowledge Councillor Rachel Hartigan who recently brought a motion to Clare County Council on this issue.

I call for a change to the electoral law. There have been recommendations. We need it to be changed so that personal home addresses are no longer published on public electoral documents. I also ask in the interim that local authorities provide elected representatives with a safe, accessible public address they can use and also provide them with a safe, accessible public space where they can meet constituents in a safe environment. I do not think it is too

much to ask. It is not an extravagance that we cannot afford for our democracy. I would appreciate if the Leader would take up the issue.

Senator Garret Kelleher: Cuirim fáilte mhór roimh ambasadóir na Gearmáine, an t-ambasadóir Gill. Gabhaimid buíochas leis as ucht theacht anseo inniu chun lá náisiúnta na Gearmáine, a bheidh ar siúl ar an Satharn, a cheiliúradh. I have many happy memories of my many visits to Germany especially with the Lender family in Auweiler, Cologne, a city with which my home city, Cork, is twinned. What we all have in common is an aspiration for a better future. Along with others, my party, Fine Gael, aspires to achievement of a new and unified Ireland, recognising that not everybody shares this aspiration. Irrespective of what the future holds for our island, we believe that lessons can be learned from Germany's journey towards reunification while acknowledging that political and social differences continue to exist between east and west in Germany 36 years after reunification, as we saw in the recent regional elections.

Ireland, Germany and the EU must continue to focus on unity, justice and freedom not only within the borders of the European Union but beyond in places such as Africa, Ukraine and the Middle East. We must show strong, positive leadership in the wider world, helping to bring wars and conflicts to an end. We must not be afraid to lead in tackling collective global challenges such as climate, inequality and hunger, all of which are severely adversely impacted by war and conflict. I shed tears of happiness when I saw the television pictures of the leadership the people of Germany showed to us and to our European partners in opening their homes to welcome displaced Ukrainians after the illegal Russian invasion of their country in 2022.

I have often since wondered, as I mentioned to the ambassador when we met last year, why the same solidarity and commitment has not been shown by the EU to the people of Palestine, who, as our Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, rightly said at the United Nations General Assembly last week, have been failed by the international community.

Herr Botschafter, genauso wie in der EU sollten wir uns immer darauf fokussieren, was uns verbindet und nicht auf das, was uns trennt. Was uns verbindet ist der Wunsch nach Frieden.

Wie Friedrich Schiller im Sommer von 1785 in seiner "Ode an die Freude" geschrieben hat, "Alle Menschen werden Brüder; Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt." Herr Botschafter, wir dürfen nicht vergessen dass die Palästinenser und auch die Israelis unsere Schwestern und Brüder sind und wir in der EU müssen immer versuchen miteinander gemeinsam auf eine zwei-Staaten-Lösung zu arbeiten.

Ambassador, we must recognise that Palestinians and Israelis are also our sisters and brothers and that the EU must show stronger and fair leadership to work with them and other international partners towards the achievement of a two-state solution, which will enable all the children of both Palestine and Israel to achieve a better future, living peacefully side by side.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh, a chomhghleacaithe agus a ambasadóir. Tá súil agam go mbainfidh tú féin agus muintir na Gearmáine an-taitneamh as bhur lá náisiúnta ar an Satharn.

Senator Tom Clonan: I also welcome - *willkommen* - my neighbour and our German ambassador. I cannot follow Senator Kelleher's contribution. My German is limited to "Wo ist den Campingplatz, mein lieber Schatz?" That is about it. On a serious note, though, from the *Gesellschaft* of European relationships and international relationships to the *Gemeinschaft* of our personal relationships across all our diplomatic community here in Dublin, we are very lucky with the people we have. I thank the ambassador again for a great evening at German Unity Day on Tuesday.

I want to talk about this country and what kind of a country it is because we need, after the budget, to have a conversation about this. I had as guests here surgeons from Phoenix, Arizona, the Christmas of 2025. They had access to and sight of the medical records of children on the urology waiting lists and spinal surgery waiting lists in Children's Health Ireland, CHI, and they told me that they did not see cases like those in the United States except for when, as part of their *pro bono* practice, they dealt with people who had come as medical refugees from Latin America and were in advanced stages of illness and cancer that were not normally seen in developed countries. One of the surgeons said that that was the category into which our children fit. We have thousands of disabled children in Ireland on the urology waiting list who, for a lack of a routine and small surgical intervention - the urology pathway and the spinal pathway have been established in medicine for over 50 years - become infertile and incontinent. Their little reproductive organs do not develop. They are denied even that part of their human development. They are more prone to pancreatic, cervical, prostate and bowel cancer. That is happening in one of the wealthiest countries in the European Union, and you have to ask yourself why.

I will tell the House why. We as a society assign less human value to disabled citizens than we do to the rest of the population. I know from speaking to medical professionals in CHI that when children, God forbid, come in from road traffic collisions or are suffering from cancer, heroic measures are taken to save them. Disabled children, however, die on waiting lists - disabled children like my son, who did not get a surgery until 2018. Let me be very clear: when the Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, says that any kind of inquiry or investigation will be time limited to six years, that will not deal with my son's situation. It will not deal with others who were taken off surgical wait lists, like Harvey Morrison Sherratt, who died. He was made palliative. The note said the fella could not even sneeze, and then he died.

We are an ableist state. We are an apartheid state when it comes to disabled citizens. We had *Before We Die in the Helix*, in DCU. There are 55,000 disabled adults living at home - forced to live at home - with parents over the age of 60, and now I am in that category. There are thousands living at home with parents in their 70s, or even in their 90s, caring for disabled children. What kind of a society is this? I look forward with interest to seeing how the Government will deal with this in the budget, but when the budget is over and the dust has settled, we need to have a proper conversation in this House about the rights of disabled citizens and adults. We are 50 years behind Germany in terms of legislation and rights.

Senator Pauline Tully: I, too, very much welcome the German ambassador, H.E. David Gill. As I was walking in, he was talking about St. Kilian. St. Kilian is very much associated with Mullagh, in County Cavan, and there have been trips by Cavan County Council to Germany and *vice versa* to celebrate the memory of St. Kilian.

Today, I would like to talk about ALONE. I attended a presentation by ALONE in Buswells yesterday, as I am sure many of us did. It has a number of very important requests for this budget, which I know is probably already decided at this stage. One of the situations it talked about was how if a couple were both receiving a pension and then one sadly passed away, the income was halved but the bills were not. There would still be a similar heating bill, electricity bill and so on, and it could become extremely hard for that person to manage on their own. ALONE is calling for the living alone allowance to be increased because it has not been increased in quite some time. It has requests regarding some of the other benefits as well, such as the telephone support allowance, which still relates to a landline. Most households do not have a landline now. ALONE says that the allowance should be broadened out into a communications allowance. It is talking about having a technology package for older people. One of my sons, when he was in transition year, TY, did a project where he showed older people how to use technology. It went really well, and my younger son is about to do the same. He is in TY now and is looking forward to it. The older people really enjoyed that and were well able to use the technology once they were shown. I get my sons to show me things that I still do not know or understand.

We also need a national plan for loneliness. That was one of the matters ALONE brought up. According to a European Commission Joint Research Centre study, Ireland is the loneliest nation in Europe, with over 20% of respondents saying they are lonely. We are not just talking about older people here, but all age groups. I think a national plan on loneliness would be really important to address that.

The other issue I want to raise today is the social housing income thresholds in Cavan. They are still extremely low. The threshold is only €30,000. I am witnessing families being evicted from their private rented accommodation. They are earning over €30,000, which is not hard to do in this day and age, so they do not qualify for social housing or any of the supports associated with it. For example, you go across the border into Meath and the threshold is much higher, yet the rent is similar. The rent has increased hugely in Cavan. People are in dire straits at the moment. There is very little available to rent, but what is available is extremely expensive and, as I said, most of these people do not qualify. I ask that the thresholds be reviewed and increased, and not just in Cavan. A number of other counties are on a similar level. There are three different levels, and €30,000 is far too low.

Senator Patricia Stephenson: I want to raise the annual school transport crisis that a lot of families face. It is particularly pertinent in rural areas, particularly where I am living in Carlow-Kilkenny. We all know that back to school time for parents and families is incredibly stressful. There is huge expense. Parents are also having to scramble to find alternative ways to get their children to school. This time around, we saw Bus Éireann notifying parents at the last minute, and in some cases just a week before school was due to start, that their children were not going to get bus places even though in the previous year they had received them, or that they were no longer getting tickets. It is not a new problem; it is an annual problem that we have. We need to get our heads together and discuss how to fix it. I know there is a review in place, but we cannot have families facing struggles year after year. I have heard from parents regarding a school on the Carlow-Laois border, Knockbeg College. They rely heavily on school buses because of the location of the college. There is no public bus route to get to the school from Carlow, so there is no way of getting to school.

There are single parents, parents who do not drive, parents who have additional caring duties with other children that mean they cannot leave home twice a day during the school rushes, parents who are trying to get younger children to crèche, etc. People have complex lives. They are massively struggling to get their kids to school.

There are so many inconsistencies with aspects of the school transport scheme. It does not reflect the reality of families living in rural areas. It is not functioning perfectly. There are solutions. We had a review of the school transport scheme in 2024 that referred the need to expand the capacity by 100,000 places by 2030. As for those who do not win a seat in the lottery - it is a lottery - children as young as 12 end up navigating complex bus services alone. I have had reports of children who have got lost on the way to school because they are having to get multiple buses. It is just not safe. There are massive issues and challenges with it from a safeguarding perspective. Some young children are leaving the house at 7 a.m. and not getting home until 5.30 p.m. We are expecting them to do their homework then, having been hours and hours out of the house. We are frustrated when we hear about commuters leaving at 7 a.m. and not getting back until after 6 p.m., so schoolchildren facing that too is incredible to me.

We have a scarcity of school bus places and we also have families holding on to their tickets. If they are lucky enough to get a ticket in the lottery they hold on to it, even though they might be driving their kids to school. This means we have school buses that are not at full capacity often travelling past the houses of people whose children need spaces on the bus. They can see there are spaces but they are not available because other parents do not want to give up their ticket even if they are not regularly using it. We need to have a use-it-or-lose-it policy with the concessionary ticket because there is no logic to empty seats on school buses that other kids cannot access.

Obviously we have the question of our emissions and the need to reduce them. We have a cost-of-living crisis with families to the pin of their collar and we are exacerbating it. That children cannot get concessionary tickets to travel to school exacerbates a load of other crises families are facing. The current system is a shambles and unfit for purpose. I really hope that by next September we have a functioning system. We should have a debate on this because I know from other Senators that it impacts lots of different people, mostly in rural areas. I recognise that in places like Dublin there is so much transport that it will not have the same impact but it is one of those things that worries so many households and families annually.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: I am raising an issue of safeguarding. It is something that comes up regularly in the House and Senator Stephenson has referenced it in the context of school transport. The FAI was before the Oireachtas committee on sport and its main reason for being there was to discuss safeguarding. Imagine showing up at an Oireachtas committee to discuss safeguarding without bringing your safeguarding officer. That is an own goal straight away. I compliment Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan and Senators Ní Chuilinn and Comyn on their questioning because they stayed focused. Safeguarding is not optional for under-18s. Safeguarding and Children First are not optional. It is not *à la carte*. It is legislative. We have to protect our most vulnerable. We do not want to be dealing with retrospective cases when they turn 18 and now understand what happened might have been inappropriate. I am disappointed because I listened to "Morning Ireland" and Newstalk hoping somebody would pick up on the fact the FAI showed up without its safeguarding officer. The questions were not

answered on it. To be fair to the Deputy and the Senators, they were probing really hard to get answers. Parents need accountability. They need assurance when they drop their child off to training or to a match. Yesterday was all about referees and whether the referees presiding over games are Garda vetted. The FAI could not answer the questions. Numerous times we have discussed safeguarding in care, in sport and this morning on school transport. We need a real conversation on safeguarding as well as understanding and awareness. Parents automatically assume, but we have to educate them that they have to adhere to safeguarding legislation.

Senator Manus Boyle: I wish to highlight the infrastructure in Carrick, County Donegal, which is holding back the future development of a rural Gaeltacht community. We are constantly told rural Ireland needs more housing, more tourism, a stronger local economy and sustainable population growth. However, in Carrick these goals cannot be achieved as the local wastewater treatment system is no longer fit for purpose. The existing holding tank was built in 1970 for a much smaller population and is operating well beyond its intended capacity. This outdated infrastructure is preventing new housing developments, restricting business opportunities and limiting the community's ability to grow. As far back as 2010 it was identified that a new wastewater treatment plant was needed to provide proper treatment and support future development. Despite the community's call for action, nothing has been done and Carrick is not included in any investment programme. The local community has an ambitious plan for regeneration through the Carrick 2040 strategy but these plans cannot be delivered without the basic infrastructure needed to support them. I am calling on the Minister and Uisce Éireann to urgently prioritise the upgrading or replacement of the Carrick water treatment plant. This investment is essential for the local environment, to support housing, for tourism and to allow a vibrant Gaeltacht community to reach its full potential. There is a great community in Carrick. I am not sure if the Deputy Leader knows it but it is a lovely wee town. I must champion the group that is here. They have taken this on and they have run with it. I hope the Deputy Leader will come to Donegal some day. If she visits beautiful Sliabh Liag she will pass through Carrick on her way. The problem is we want our people to stay at home in Carrick. We need them to be able to build at home and to maximise the tourism potential of Sliabh Liag. We could do a lot more if we had development of that infrastructure.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Before I call Senator Boyhan I welcome the Cathaoirleach, who is accompanied by H.E. Ms Cristina Gherasimov, Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration of the Republic of Moldova. She is accompanied by Ms Larisa Miculeţ, chargé d'affaires of the Republic of Moldova to Ireland, who is a regular visitor to the Seanad, and Ms Aura Revenco, communication adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister. You are all very welcome and I hope your visit is successful.

I call Senator Boyhan.

Senator Victor Boyhan: Thank you, a Leas-Chathaoirligh. I join you in welcoming the distinguished guests of the Cathaoirleach to the Distinguished Visitors Gallery. I see friends there. I have certainly been at many functions with them and I thank them for that. I hope they have a successful day.

I am calling for a debate on open government data and the freedom of information Act. I do so in the context of exempted development. I will quickly take the House through a number

of points. On 29 July 2025, submissions opened for the public consultation on the review of exempted development. On 26 August 2025, this public consultation closed to submission. On 14 January 2026, the general scheme of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2026 was published. On 28 January, a pre-legislative scrutiny letter was issued on the heads of that Bill. On 26 June, the Bill was introduced on First Stage. The legislation contained sections on exempted development. On 3 July, multiple motions were introduced in the Seanad on exempted development. On 9 July, a freedom of information request was submitted by me to the Department of housing and local government. I requested that under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 the Department release all 900 submissions to the public consultation on the review. On 15 July, motions on exempted development were agreed in Dáil Éireann. On 16 July, the motions were agreed in this House and we moved on. To fast-track it, I then initiated the process and it was refused by the Department. I did the appeal and it was refused by the Department. I paid the fee and it was refused by the Department.

11 o'clock

Eventually, it was accepted by the Information Commissioner. Last night, I received a letter before I left this House from the commissioner, which suggested that the offer to withdraw the application did not affect my rights and I was under no obligation to withdraw. Why was that suggested? Having refused me all along, and while I paid all the fees and put a tracker of every part of this process, the Department decided yesterday in its wisdom that it should put it up on *gov.ie*. Despite all my requests and my refusals, the Department put a limited version of this up. It is very interesting because the Department forgot to take certain names out of it while leaving a lot of names, albeit not intentionally, in another section of it. This morning, I wrote to the commissioner, the Secretary General of the Department and the Minister. I am not withdrawing the process and I formally informed them of that today, so it will proceed. I am writing to every Member of both Houses of the Oireachtas. The email is ready. That is why I want to put it on record. When I leave here, I will be sending a detailed email of the timelines of all sections of it and also the fact that I am not withdrawing the application. I will, of course, be sharing the link to the *gov.ie* website.

There is more to this. It is about transparency and open and accountable government. In that context, I am now calling for a debate on freedom of information, FOI, open data and protected disclosures. We are all hearing about protected disclosures. Many politicians in the last two weeks have been talking about protected disclosures made externally to here. We need protected disclosure legislation that supports politicians in Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann. That is the genesis. That is the request. We want openness, transparency and open data in government central to the Houses of the Oireachtas and I intend to continue bringing this up every week until we get this. I am confident that I will be successful in this.

I thank the Deputy Leader for her time.

Senator Paraic Brady: I have good news for the farming community this morning, in that the Minister, Deputy Heydon, has extended the time to allow farmers under the agri-climate rural environment scheme, ACRES, geese and swan action to graze for an extra month. Especially when we are coming into a fodder crisis and everyone knows that there is a shortage in the country, an extra month for these farmers to graze on that land will certainly ease a burden over the winter. I thank the Minister and his officials for bringing this initiative forward

because these are situations where the burden is on the farmer, who is heavily penalised if they graze this land. They usually shut them off at the end of September but now farmers get an extra month, with the weather good and everything else. I thank the Minister and his officials for this extension.

Going home yesterday evening through our capital, it was mind-boggling to see how many people were on bikes, but also how many were on bikes without lights, dressed in black with no hi-vis, etc. I encountered at least three people who could have been in an accident with me. They were cycling on the wrong side of the road facing traffic and with no hi-vis or lights on them. It is no great wonder that so many people are knocked off bikes when this is going on in the capital. There has to be some law whereby if you go out in the pitch of night, you must have a light or a hi-vis vest. If people are found without them, the bikes should at least be lifted off people and some fine issued.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Before I move to the next speaker, I welcome Deputy Michael Murphy from Tipperary and his guests Annabelle and Patrick Normoyle. I hope that they enjoy their visit to Leinster House today.

I call Senator Andrews.

Senator Chris Andrews: I agree with Senator Rabbitte and her comments towards the FAI. It does not really surprise me that its officials would come in to discuss safeguarding without a safeguarding officer, so I fully agree with the Senator's comments.

I wish to raise the income eligibility thresholds for social housing, which have not been revised since 2023. Since then, wages and social welfare payments have increased significantly with inflation and the cost of living putting pressure on people, but there has been no change to the social housing income eligibility thresholds. The result is that a growing number of people are now being removed from council waiting lists. In some cases, people are losing up to ten years of time on the list through no fault of their own. The low thresholds are also blocking people who are unable to afford private or cost-rental accommodation from getting on the council list and accessing housing assistant payment, HAP. It is unfair to people who are cut off. They are caught in the middle. They cannot afford the astronomical prices and they do not qualify for the housing list, so they are stuck in limbo. In Dublin City Council, a single person can have a maximum income of €40,000 to access public housing support, meaning someone making €39,000 a year would be considerably better off as a result of the support offered by HAP. Even less fair than that is that a single parent can only have a maximum of €41,000, which is an income far too low to properly provide for a child. The Government needs to raise social housing income eligibility thresholds as a matter of urgency and initiate a reform of income assessments and banding. People in need of public housing should not be denied access to council waiting lists or social housing supports because of outdated and badly designed eligibility rules and thresholds. I would appreciate it if the Minister could come in to look at that and redesign the eligibility criteria.

Senator Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: Today marks the start of National Breastfeeding Week. There is no doubt that a baby who is breastfed has a fantastic and, probably, the best start in life. I wish to acknowledge that and acknowledge the great work many mothers do in

this regard. However, I also think today of the mothers who, for many reasons, do not breastfeed. Sometimes, it just does not suit them to. Many times, it just does not work out. This week, while we acknowledge the fantastic idea of breastfeeding, we must also be very conscious of the mothers for whom it does not quite work out.

Senator Eileen Lynch: I bring colleagues' attention, prior to the budget madness of next week, to a briefing I am hosting in the audiovisual room next Wednesday at 11 a.m. about stem cell transplants and the lack of stem cell transplant facilities in Ireland. Currently, you can only receive stem cell transplants in Galway or St. James's Hospital in Dublin. There are 2,400 people diagnosed in Ireland every year with a blood-related cancer, but the lack of stem cell therapy means that a lot of people are excluded from accessing this treatment. What we are advocating for is that a stem cell transplant lab be granted in Cork University Hospital. This would come at a cost of €27 million, as the national cancer control programme, NCCP, has already provided a full-time nurse and a half-time consultant in Cork University Hospital. Now, we need the lab. It was a service that was provided up until 2006, at which point it ceased. Since 2010, there have been two attempts to reinstate it in the hospital. This has not happened. It is currently on a group project list but we are asking that it be taken on its own and given priority. I appreciate that this may sound very Cork-based, but this would not just benefit patients in Cork. It would benefit patients anywhere in the south east and south west as well as patients in the east and the north west, because the reduction of patients having to come from a referral from Cork University Hospital to Galway or Dublin would decrease the demands on those services. That briefing is on next week at 11 a.m. We are very lucky to be joined by Professor Ibrahim Yakoub-Agha who is president of the European Society for Blood and Marrow Transplantation, as well as many other experts, including Dr. Bruce Levine who founded the CAR T-cell transplant treatment.

I wish to particularly commend Mags McCarthy, a patient advocate who lives near me at home in Cork North-West and is from Dripsey. She has done so much awareness raising on this issue and it was she who came to me a few months ago to try to put this together. She has been working with a lot of TDs and Senators across parties. This is a cross-party thing. I would like to get as much support as possible, so I urge Senators to support that next week.

If the Leas-Chathaoirleach will indulge me slightly, I wish to commend the National Ambulance Service and the air ambulance service.

We are very lucky where I am to have an air ambulance in Rathcoole. Somebody very dear to me suffered a cardiac arrest yesterday in a small village in Cork. Thankfully an ambulance as well as an air ambulance reached him within seven minutes. We are very lucky and he is doing incredibly well. A lot of the time we speak about issues where a service is not good enough or a service is inadequately funded. When we have personal experience of these things, it is important to commend that service. I give my deepest thanks to the air ambulance and the national ambulance services. I want to highlight a good news story because too often we come here with critical stories. I thank them very much and commend them on the work they do.

Senator Laura Harmon: I raise the issue of workers' rights and public sector workers. I support public sector workers across the country who are beginning industrial action. The Government needs to engage with these workers in good faith to come up with a proper pay agreement. These are front-line workers across the country, including teachers, special needs

assistants, healthcare workers, nurses, firefighters, public servants and civil servants, including people working in the Houses of the Oireachtas. I stand with them. The Government needs to show respect to them. These people are struggling with payment of rents, saving for a home of their own or paying mortgages. They are struggling with the high cost of energy, childcare and transport. We need to take them seriously. The country would come to a halt without these workers. It is important for the Government to engage with them so we can come to a solution here. Nobody wants to be striking. These workers want to get on with their jobs but unfortunately they are in this position because they need a new pay agreement. I stand with the unions which represent them so well.

I expressed my solidarity with the student movement, Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn, which is having a national protest calling for better funding for the higher education sector, the ending of the student contribution fee and a proper student accommodation strategy. I stand with those students in their calls in their pre-budget submission.

I offer my condolences to the family of Seamus Carroll, an usher in these Houses, on his passing. He will be deeply missed by all of us in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Senator Ollie Crowe: As Members may be aware, October is Dyslexia Awareness Month. To mark the start of it, Dyslexia Ireland surveyed more than 900 teachers, parents and students on what changes they wanted to see. The survey found that a lack of teacher training about dyslexia is the single biggest barrier facing dyslexic children in Ireland today. It is estimated that one in ten have some form of dyslexia and this issue affects approximately 100,000 students across the country in primary, secondary and higher education.

The results of the survey showed that both parents and teachers feel this issue should be addressed in a similar way, with 94% of the parents and 82% of the teachers saying they want mandatory training for every teacher in Ireland, the single biggest policy request from both groups. Some 60% of teachers said they do not know the best reading or spelling programme to use to support the children. Some 89% of parents said teachers are not sufficiently trained to support them. Some 68% of dyslexic young people said a lack of knowledge of dyslexia by teachers was one of the biggest challenges they face, ranking it above exam supports, diagnosis delays and public awareness. Given the numbers impacted, it is clear this issue needs action by the Department of Education and Youth and I would be grateful if the Leader of the House would raise it with the Minister, Deputy Naughton.

Senator Gareth Scahill: I welcome the announcement yesterday by the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, Deputy Norma Foley, of seven new early learning and childcare projects under the State-led early learning and childcare capital programme. It was especially good to see Boyle included in that allocation this year. There have been a lot of representations. It has been raised in this House and the Lower House on repeated occasions by Government representatives and it is good to see Government is delivering where a community has demonstrated extreme need for this. I congratulate the Boyle childcare committee led by Christina Egan of the Boyle family resource centre. I thank all my colleagues in the constituency who have collectively worked on this. I might have been the only one in the country who adhered to the embargo time, but I am not going to throw the rattle out of the pram on this occasion.

I also recognise Dyslexia Awareness Month, which Senator Crowe just mentioned. I will not go over the figures again. It is very important to mention it. I spoke to a parent recently who spent a week working with one of their children, concentrating on preparing the child for the Friday morning spelling test. Right up until the Thursday evening the child really put the effort in. What threw the child on the Friday morning was the teacher saying there were five minutes to do the questions. That just threw the whole thing out the window. I just want to recognise that.

That connects very easily into the work we are doing on inclusive education at the Joint Committee on Education and Youth at the moment. Feedback from extensive work on that which Senator Nelson Murray has been involved with me, has pointed out that continuous professional development must be a core part of building a genuinely inclusive education system. It is important that we recognise Dyslexia Awareness Month in this House. The foundation of the campaign this month is effective teaching changes lives. That is a very important message and can probably stretch far beyond dyslexia into a number of other areas. I would support having a debate in this House on that topic, which Senator Crowe called for.

I welcome this morning's announcement of funding for community vehicles under measure 2 of the CLÁR programme. It is great to see a small community in Keadue, operating out of the Mo Chairde Centre in St. Ronan's Hall benefiting from getting just under €27,000 to support its meals on wheels programme, which is delivering these meals directly where they are needed in the community. It is another example that when a community can demonstrate demand, show where it is needed and engage with those people, Government will support that. I recognise Government for that.

Senator Martin Conway: I also recognise that this month is Dyslexia Awareness Month. Dyslexia is far more widely recognised now than it was but there is a significant amount of work to be done particularly in the area of education.

I thank the Leader for organising statements on road safety yesterday. This is an issue of critical importance. Unfortunately, because yesterday's Order of Business ran over, the time allocated to the debate was curtailed. I request that, perhaps in six months, we would have the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, back for follow-up statements on this issue. A number of very good suggestions, ideas and collaboration proposals emanated from the discussions yesterday. They could be developed upon further. We could afford the Minister of State an opportunity to give an update on some of those.

As I said yesterday, a lot of it is down to personal behaviour. It is a privilege to be able to sit behind the wheel of a car or sit on the saddle of a bike because not everybody can. There are people, such as me, who will never be able to drive and there are other people who will never be able to cycle and do not have that privilege. It is a privilege and that is why privileges should be respected. That is why people should abide by the rules of the road. There are enough circumstances outside of one's control when accidents happen but when it is within the control of people, certain respect should accord and people should simply abide by the rules of the road.

Finally, like everybody else I was shocked and saddened to hear of poor Seamus Carroll's passing. He was a lovely man. I have known him in these Houses for the past decade as an usher. Like all of our ushers he was extremely helpful. He was very courteous and a very nice

man. To his wife, Treasa, who also works in the Houses, I extend my sympathy, as everybody else has done. It is a terrible loss and may he rest in peace.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Before I call the next speaker I welcome guests of our colleague, Senator Noel O'Donovan. They are a group from west Cork. I hope they enjoy their visit to Leinster House. They are all welcome.

Senator Cathal Byrne: I join the Leas-Chathaoirleach in welcoming our guests. They are most welcome, and I hope they have an enjoyable trip.

Today I raise the issue of pensions for our local councillors. I know the local democracy task force on the future of local government reported in March and an implementation plan was published in July. I have spoken to a lot of our local authority representatives, who have highlighted to me that there is still no clarity on what the future will be for them with regards to a pension. At the moment, once they have passed the age of 50 they are entitled to a gratuity payment which is maxed out at three times their salary. However, there is a widespread view among our councillors that they would prefer to pay into a pension and have that available to them once they retire. For me, one of the key points about all of this is that if the gratuity is maxed out after 20 years of service somebody who was elected to the council in their early 20s or 30s finds after 20 years of service that they have reached a ceiling. Our local authorities benefit from having people of experience together with new people coming forward. It is important that this area is looked at. I ask for a debate specifically on the issue of local authority pensions.

Senator Linda Nelson Murray: The international symbol for civil defence is a blue triangle on an orange background. It is worn by all members to show they are part of a worldwide network of committed people who are prepared to serve in their own country or overseas as part of practical disaster relief assistance. Meath Civil Defence is a brilliant example of what volunteering and community spirit can achieve. There are more than 170 active members, and it works under the administration of Meath County Council. These are people who give their time, train week after week and put themselves forward when their county needs them. That is whether they are responding to a flood, searching for a missing person, supporting the fire service or providing first aid at a local sporting event. On 21 December 2025, a devastating fire broke out at Meath Civil Defence headquarters in Mullaghboy Industrial Estate in Navan. A significant amount of equipment was destroyed, including vehicles, an ambulance, fire equipment, rescue boats, generators and other emergency response equipment. Thankfully, nobody was injured. They faced a huge setback, but they did not step back; they stepped up. Civil Defence units from across the country came to their assistance. Volunteers kept working, and now they are rebuilding and getting back to what they do best - protecting and supporting the people of Meath. This is the best of volunteering and Meath should be, and is, incredibly proud of its Civil Defence. They lost their building and they lost equipment, but they never lost the most important thing, which is their people, their commitment and their willingness to serve. I recently attended an event at their building where a booklet, *Be Emergency Ready*, was launched. It has since been delivered all around Ireland with great tips for all of us. On Saturday, two days from now, they will officially launch their headquarters. Although I cannot

attend, today I want to recognise the work Meath Civil Defence does. I wish them the best of luck in continuing to help people from their new building for many years to come.

Senator Mark Duffy: I join other Senators in offering my sincere condolences on the sad passing of Leinster House usher, Seamus Carroll. I offer condolences to his wider group of family, friends and all of the ushers in the House. I know they are a family among themselves, and it is a huge loss to lose one of their own while still working here.

I raise the call for specific funding for swimming pools. All across our country, particularly in my home county of Mayo, swimming pools have closed for various reasons. They offer a huge public utility, regardless of whether they are privately or publicly operated. To me it should not matter as long as they are open to the public and being used. There should be a funding scheme in place to revive and open swimming pools that are closed. I think of a privately operated pool at a hotel in Belmullet. I know Councillor Gerry Coyle and the community are working hard to create solutions that can make it feasible to reopen that. I think of a purpose-built specialised pool in Swinford for those with disabilities. People of all abilities could use it, but it was designed to be specialised for rehab and for those with a disability. If it were reopened, it could offer a huge amount to those who need it most in terms of rehabilitation. It could give dignity and access to swimming pools to wheelchair users who do not have that access at the moment. To go back to the Belmullet pool, the people of Erris have to drive an hour to get to their nearest indoor or heated swimming pool. A scheme that can help to reopen pools, whether private or public, would be welcomed. There should, at least, be some type of energy grants to support them with retrofitting to make them as energy efficient as possible, and to revive and reopen them to make them accessible to all members of the public. That would be welcome.

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: We started with Senator Fitzpatrick, who led the expressions of sympathy for Seamus Carroll, and to his wife Treasa, his children Cillian and Aisling, his family, friends and colleagues. Many Senators have spoken about what a fine person Seamus was, and how sad it is for all of those connected to him. We had a minute's silence yesterday to mark the passing of Seamus. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

Senator Fitzpatrick also spoke about the lack of seriousness with regard to the safety of public representatives. She mentioned a recent AILG survey showing that 63% of councillors have experienced harassment and half of them have considered leaving public life for that reason. That is obviously a concern because democracy is based on people putting their names forward, showing up, standing up and helping to make decisions. It is definitely concerning. Senator Fitzpatrick asked for a change to the electoral law so that addresses would not be published - I also asked for that yesterday - and suggested that in the interim local authorities could provide an address sufficient to the demands of public life to which people could write should they wish to contact a councillor, and could also provide a sufficient public space where councillors could meet the people they represent.

Senator Kelleher spoke about his links with Cologne and his many visits there. *Sie haben eine starke Botschaft gesandt.* He gave a stark and important message to the ambassador, and I thank the Senator for that. It is important that we all play our role in tackling human injustices around the world. I agree that Germany should show more leadership with regard to Palestine.

Indeed, the EU collectively needs to show leadership in relation to the two-state solution, so I thank him for his words.

Senator Clonan spoke about the children on urology waiting lists in Ireland, and said that children are effectively being denied proper development. It is concerning, as is what he said about the time-limiting wait list. Last week a number of issues about disability were raised, so we reached out to see if we could get the Minister to come to the House.

I am happy to confirm that on 14 October, we will have a debate on disability where many of these issues can be raised with the Minister.

Senator Tully spoke about the links between St. Kilian and Germany. She also spoke about the ALONE presentation in Buswells. It was interesting to be there and talk about the impact made by ALONE. It certainly has in terms of the number of people around the country who will visit homes and go through issues with the residents, in particular older people who live on their own. The Senator mentioned that ALONE mentioned that the income is halved when one half of a couple passes away and suggested there should be some type of support, even on a phased basis, but definitely, the living alone allowance should be increased and a technology allowance, which I would agree with as well.

The Senator asked about a national plan for loneliness. Two weeks ago I hosted a meeting in the audiovisual room where eight NGOs that deal with older people came together, which is called the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs. Loneliness is one of the areas that was highlighted. It is something that we have already brought to the Government's attention but we will do so again. Senator Tully also spoke about the social housing thresholds for Cavan, which need to be raised.

Senator Stephenson spoke about school transport and the fact that despite best efforts, notifications about a lack of a seat is issued at the very last minute. I totally appreciate how frustrating that situation is for a family, and particularly in rural places where there is no public transport and it is very difficult where either there is no car or that car is used by a parent for employment purposes.

The Senator also asked about concessionary tickets. Anecdotally, we all hear of people who have concessionary tickets but do not use them. The Senator has suggested that if people do not use their concessionary tickets that they should lose them. This is a concern. It should not be the case that people can access a ticket if they are not really going to use it.

Senator Rabbitte spoke about the issue of safeguarding. It is quite shocking that we had a long debate on safeguarding in the Joint Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport but the FAI did not bring its safeguarding personnel. As the Senator noted, safeguarding is not optional but is something that we must have everywhere. Parents not alone need accountability, they need to be able to trust the process and the process needs to work. Parents need to have the confidence that their children are in a situation where proper safeguarding measures exist. I agree with the Senator and we will seek a debate. I am not sure whether the Senator wants a debate on safeguarding in general or on the soccer element. I will clarify that aspect with her and we will look for a debate.

Senator Boyle spoke about Carrick, County Donegal, and Sliabh Liag. Donegal is a beautiful county. I do not get to visit it often enough but certainly it is lovely. The Senator is

very concerned about the infrastructure as the wastewater system is not fit for purpose and there is a need to upgrade the plant, which we will support. I suggest that the Senator tables a Commencement matter on that wastewater plant. It is an ongoing problem with Irish Water is it not? There seems to be a lack of accountability.

Senator Boyhan spoke about open government data and exempted development. He gave a timeline for where he had sought to get sight of the 900 submissions to the Department and how a limited version was put on *gov.ie*. The Senator has put on record that he is not withdrawing his request for the information and will write to the Ministers and all Members. He also asked for a protected disclosure policy for Members of the Oireachtas, which we certainly will ask to be looked into.

Senator Brady mentioned that there was good news for the farming community. He thanked the Minister for agriculture for the extra month for grazing for those in the poultry industry. The Senator also spoke about the cyclists who traverse the roads without lights, high-vis clothing and helmets. I think that sometimes at the cusp of autumn and going into dark nights that some cyclists forget that it will get dark quickly. I echo the Senator's call for it to be mandatory for cyclists to have these items. I believe that cyclists should be stopped, if they can be, if they do not safety equipment and gear because it will keep them safe and keep everyone else safe.

Senator Andrews also spoke about income thresholds eligibility for social housing, which have not been revised since 2023. Without doubt, there are people caught in that trap no matter where they live and we will seek a debate on eligibility.

Senator Murphy O'Mahony mentioned the start of National Breastfeeding Week. It is an important week and I highlight the work of the subgroup here within the Oireachtas. It has been great to have had an increase in the number of lactation consultants over the past few years. The Senator also spoke about the fact that breastfeeding does not work out for many mothers and that we also must think of them.

Senator Lynch mentioned that next Wednesday she will host a presentation in the audiovisual room on stem cell transplants, which can only happen in two hospitals at this time. The Senator also mentioned that in CUH there is a big call for it and how, Mags McCarthy, a patient advocate, has been very much to the forefront of calling for this. It is part of a group list and Senator Lynch has called for it to be prioritised on its own. Senator Lynch also mentioned an air ambulance that arrived within seven minutes, which is quite incredible. I hope that the person she mentioned is doing well and will continue to recuperate. The Senator is right that it is important to mention when those who are in emergency response units really step up to the plate because so often we hear about the others. Our thanks to those.

Senator Harmon spoke about the issue of workers' rights and the fact that industrial action has begun. We certainly all want a solution to that. I know that the Government wants to engage in good faith but while the Minister, Deputy Chambers, and I have heard him say it repeatedly, is open to sitting down and negotiating, he does not want to have preconditions. We certainly hope that a resolution will be found. The Senator mentioned that students have called for better funding. I number of us met them in Buswells yesterday. They had a number of asks around school accommodation, registration fees and supports for Irish within universities.

Senator Crowe mentioned that October is Dyslexia Awareness Month and mentioned a survey that showed a lack of teacher training was the biggest issue. I completely agree with him that such teacher training should be mandatory. I also think that professional training for teachers is important. I have no doubt that training about dyslexia is an element of teacher training at this point and I believe that adequate supports and training should be provided to teachers within the system on an ongoing basis through the education centres and via summer courses. It is important that children receive an early diagnosis and teachers need to have the skills to pick up whether a child has dyslexia in order that extra supports and time can be given. Senator Scahill also spoke about the amount of time involved. If a diagnosis is made then extra time is granted during State exams and it is important that that time is allocated in class on a day-to-day basis in relation to exams and tests.

Senator Scahill spoke about the seven childcare projects and it is good to see Boyle included. This morning, I received a phone call from Councillor Sean Moylan who said exactly the same thing. We want those projects started as soon as possible and that is the question that Councillor Moylan asked me. We certainly want to see the projects started as soon as possible.

The Senator spoke about inclusive education. A small number of reader schools help those who have severe dyslexia. We need more of them around the country, particularly in more rural areas. The idea is that a child goes in for a year and after a year will have had sufficient support to be able to revert to his or her own school, which is a great thing. We should look for more. Effective teaching does change lives.

Senator Scahill also highlighted the CLÁR measure 2 that supports meals on wheels in Keadue.

Senator Conway spoke about the statements on road safety that we had yesterday. It had to be curtailed because the Order of Business overran. He looked for a debate again in six months on road safety. That is something I will ask for. It is a privilege to be able to drive. It is something we should not take for granted and it should be respected.

Senator Byrne spoke about pensions for local councillors and the fact that at this point in time there is no clarity on pensions. As we know, councillors are entitled to gratuities but they would prefer to pay into pensions, particularly those who are working as councillors full time. There should be flexibility because paying into a pension might not suit all councillors. Those who also have full-time jobs may be paying into other pension schemes. It is something we need to have a debate on and support our local representatives.

Senator Nelson Murray spoke about Civil Defence, the importance of Meath Civil Defence and the fire that sadly broke out in December 2025. Civil Defence has had to rebuild and we have seen the very best of volunteering through that. The new building launches on Saturday and we wish them all well. We also wish the volunteers in Civil Defence well all around the country. It is a wonderful organisation.

Senator Duffy spoke about funding for swimming pools and the fact that funding should be made available whether they are private or public. He highlighted a number of pools in Mayo which are private and have been closed. He raises an interesting point. A swimming strategy was produced in 2023, I think, which said every child in the country should have access to a swimming pool and be able to swim. Unfortunately, that is not the case. We will look for a

debate on swimming pools and the funding that can and should be made available. The Senator will be able to contribute to that.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Before I put the Order of Business to the House, I would also like to be associated with the expressions of sympathy on the death of Seamus Carroll to his wife Treasa, his son Cillian and daughter, Aisling but also to his colleagues, his fellow ushers and all the staff here in the House, because Seamus was a gentleman and everybody knew him. He was always so courteous and helpful. May he rest in peace. It was very sad to hear of his passing.

Order of Business agreed to.

Sitting of the Seanad: Motion

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: I move:

That, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders relative to Public Business, the following arrangements shall apply in relation to the sittings of the Seanad on 6th, 7th and 8th October, 2026:

(1) The Seanad shall meet at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, 6th October, 2026, and the following arrangements shall apply:

(a) Standing Orders 31 and 32 shall stand suspended;

(b) The Order of Business shall be proposed at 4 p.m.;

(2) The following arrangements shall apply to the sittings of the Seanad on Wednesday 7th and Thursday 8th October, 2026:

(a) Up to six Commencement matters may be selected by the Cathaoirleach for discussion on each day.”

Question put and agreed to.

Report of the Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence: Motion

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: I move:

That Seanad Éireann shall take note of the Report of the Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence entitled ‘First interim Report’, copies of which were laid before Seanad Éireann on 12th December, 2025.”

Question put and agreed to.

Report of the Joint Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport: Motion

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: I move:

That Seanad Éireann shall take note of the Report of the Joint Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport entitled 'Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the revised General Scheme of the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill', copies of which were laid before Seanad Éireann on 17th September, 2025."

Question put and agreed to.

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

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: Next Tuesday at 4 p.m.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Cuireadh an Seanad ar athló ar 11.44 a.m. go dtí 4 p.m., Dé Máirt, an 6 Deireadh Fómhair 2026.

The Seanad adjourned at 11.44 a.m. until 4 p.m. on Tuesday, 6 October 2026.