

Next week in the Oireachtas

In the Dáil next week, the Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2012 will be discussed at its second and remaining stages. In the Seanad, the Thirtieth Amendment of the Constitution (Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union) Bill 2012 will be discussed at second stage. Also next week, the Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform Committee will meet to discuss the Fiscal Assessment Report (April 2012).



News & Appointments

Minister for European Affairs addresses PAI Conference

The Minister of State for European Affairs, Lucinda Creighton TD delivered the keynote address at a joint PAI/European Movement Ireland conference on Wednesday entitled 'Ireland's Presidency of the EU, January 1 to June 30 2013: Priorities and challenges'. She was joined by a range of speakers including the President of the European Economic Social Committee (EESC), Staffan Nilsson who reflected on developments at an EU level and their likely impact on the Irish Presidency of the EU Council.

Minister Creighton outlined how the Presidency will provide an "opportunity to demonstrate that we are a constructive and committed Member State that belongs at the very heart of the EU decision-making process" and this will provide us with the chance to address "the problems that the Union faces".

The Presidency, according to the Minister, "offers Ireland a rare and valuable opportunity to manage the EU agenda and to seek ways of advancing legislation and policy that will positively improve the lives of citizens here in Ireland and across the EU". Substantial "reputational benefits", including "longer-term reputational benefits" can also be gained from the Presidency. In this regard, given the fact the international media spotlight will focus on the Presidency, this can be used to "convey important messages about Ireland, its economic recovery and its future potential".

Challenges

Discussing some of the challenges Ireland will face during its six months as President, the Minister mentioned how drastically the European Union itself has changed, particularly in size. Indeed, the Presidency has itself changed "significantly in recent years (...) there is a

new permanent President of the European Council, there is a High Representative for Foreign Affairs heading the European External Action Service and the European Parliament now has wider powers in the legislative area". The international environment in which the EU finds itself in has also changed "following the financial and economic crisis and the Arab Spring". Furthermore, the Union's competencies have also evolved, so that all "Irish Government Ministers will have some direct involvement in the Presidency". There are also increased "interlinkages between policy areas".

Focusing on the Government's main strategic priorities throughout the Irish Presidency, the Minister was keen to point out that "it is still early to be certain about priorities in some policy areas, and we will need to take into account the progress that the Danish and Cypriot Presidencies may make in many areas by the end of this year". Ireland must "strategically plan for what might arise during the Presidency in 2013".

Presidency agenda

Amongst the areas which the Minister stated "will be live during our Presidency and which will be important to us" include: the Annual Growth Survey, European Semester and Europe 2020, for which "Ireland has a specific role in assisting the delivery of this Strategy"; the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), something "of critical importance to the functioning of the EU



Tom Ferris, Economist; Geraldine Byrne Nason, Second Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach; Maurice Pratt, Chairman, European Movement Ireland; Lucinda Creighton TD, Minister of State with special responsibility for European Affairs; Mr Staffan Nilsson, President European Economic Social Committee (EESC); and Noelle O'Connell, European Movement Ireland at the conference 'Ireland's Presidency of the EU from January 1 to June 30 2013: Priorities and challenges

from 2014-2020"; the "central theme" of creating jobs and promoting sustainable economic growth; the Single Market Act and Digital Single Market; and research, development and innovation.

Furthermore, the Minister continued, "the Commission is to propose further measures to reduce the regulatory burden, including possible sectoral targets, which will need to be brought forward into the Irish Presidency. Continued consideration is also being given to identifying and advancing policy and legislative issues that will boost the SME sector mainly through the Competitiveness Council." The promotion of external trade will also feature as a key strategy for Ireland when it hosts the Presidency and "the decision to hold an informal meeting of Trade Ministers in Ireland during the Presidency which is intended to focus on EU-US trade, and to organise related business-focussed events, signals the priority that we give to this".

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The Presidency “will help to manage the implementation of the Union’s new economic governance arrangements, and our activities in this area will be very closely scrutinised by media and the markets.”

Social security coordination, pensions and fighting poverty will also feature on the Presidency agenda and poverty reduction targets (with related links to employment) are also included in Europe 2020.

“Priority will be placed on seeking ways of reducing unemployment across the EU by extending access to education and training and integrating the education agenda to a greater extent into the European Semester process to support economic recovery”

Given the importance of the agrifood sector to Ireland in its national recovery, “Ireland will seek to use its Presidency to promote innovation in agriculture, environmental sustainability and food security”.

Ireland will also “use the Presidency to focus attention on the application of new and developing technologies to boost energy efficiency, sustainability and distribution.” “The Transport, Telecoms and Energy Council will also provide Ireland with an opportunity to make progress on issues that will support the

European economy including trans-European telecoms networks.” In relation to health, “the new Clinical Trials Directive and a new medical Devices Directive will be top of the agenda. On the top of the environmental agenda, “the main emphasis will be bringing forward the 7th Environment Action programme and making progress on discussions on climate change policy (post-Durban).” The Justice and Home Affairs agenda “will focus on making the EU safer for its citizens” including “proposals on tackling organised crime including through measures on criminal asset recovery”.

Finally, as 2013 is likely to be designated as the European Year of Citizens, “this presents the opportunity to promote discussion of Ireland’s membership of the EU and Ireland’s place in Europe”.

Concluding, the Minister added: “We want our Presidency to be viewed as fair, honest and workmanlike with a focus on results. We wish to work closely and cooperatively with our partners and the institutions, espousing the Community method which guarantees fairness to all Member States, regardless of size. Above all, we wish to constructively move the EU agenda forward through consensus.”

New members appointed to the Board of TG4

Yesterday saw Minister for Communications, Pat Rabbitte TD appoint eight members to the Board of TG4. Seven of these members were newly appointed, including the Chair. The new members will serve on the Board for a five year term.

Ms Siún Ní Raghallaigh, a native speaker from Donegal, will take the place of outgoing Chair Peter Quinn. Ms Ní Raghallaigh is the former Financial Controller of the Tribune Newspaper and previously worked as Managing Director of Marketing and Development at TG4.

The other newly appointed members are as follows: Des Geraghty; Michelle Ní Chróinín; Micheál Seoighe; Mairéad Ní Cheoinín; Andréa Ní hÉalaithe and Mairéad Nic Suibhne.

Members continuing to serve on the Board include Pól Ó Gallchóir, Concubhar Ó Liatháin, Rónán Ó Coisdealbha and Joe Connolly. Mr Connolly was re-appointed on the recommendation of the Joint Oireachtas Committee. The Committee will supply the Minister with one further nominee in the coming weeks to complete the twelve member board.

Government appoints new Secretary General in the Department of Health

The Government has appointed Dr Ambrose McLoughlin as the new Secretary General in the Department of Health.

He will replace Mr Michael Scanlan who held the position of Secretary General for the past seven years before retiring earlier this month.

Prior to his appointment Dr McLoughlin was registrar and CEO of the Pharmaceutical Society

of Ireland. He has also worked on various health boards and has over 30 years experience in the Health Service ranging from Practitioner Level to Chief Executive.

Minister for Health, Dr James Reilly TD welcomed the appointment of Dr McLoughlin saying it would have “an invigorating effect on the Department of Health”. He also took the

opportunity to pay tribute to Mr Michael Scanlan whose work as Secretary General he described as ‘exemplary’.

Applications for the position were reviewed and vetted by the Top Level Appointments Committee and Dr McLoughlin was chosen from the top three candidates.

Minister Howlin delivers statement on Whistleblower Protection Legislation

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Brendan Howlin TD made a statement to the Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform this week on the General Scheme of the Protected Disclosure in the Public Interest Bill, 2012 or the more commonly known Whistleblower legislation.

Following consultation with Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Transparency International, the Minister said “initial feedback received on the legislative proposals has generally been positive in nature”.

He mentioned the outcome of the Mahon Tribunal and the recommendation to introduce a pan-sectoral whistleblower protection act in place of the sectoral approach to whistleblowing protection. He stressed the need for members of the Oireachtas to be “provided with an opportunity to consider these proposals and to provide their views and perspectives at an early stage in the legislative process”.

“Strengthening the role of the Houses of the Oireachtas in this vital respect is clearly central to the Government’s political reform agenda.

I am confident that such a review would bring significant benefits in terms of the final design

and content of the legislation in delivering on Government policy objectives for safeguarding whistleblowers.”

Noting a recent Eurobarometer poll, the Minister said “the extent to which a lack of trust in the integrity of business and politics continues to be of significant concern in Ireland, with over 8 out of 10 people feeling that corruption remains a major problem”.

The proposed legislation, which is “aligned with best practice international standards”, “can play an important role in encouraging the decisive shift required in the culture of organisations and the perspectives of those working in them to accept the positive contribution that whistleblowing can make to identifying and mitigating significant reputational risks to organisations.”

Those who take the “risk of disclosing information on serious wrongdoing in the workplace with the public interest as their goal, deserve strong legal protections against victimisation or reprisals for having taken that action.” The proposed legislation “is intended to underpin the development of a business environment in both the public and private sectors where wrongdoing is reported and the negative

and undesirable consequences for the individual who discloses such information are minimised or indeed eliminated.” It also “offers accessible reporting channels to those who want to report wrongdoing.”

The legislation also “provides the opportunity for all relevant bodies to assess the extent to which their systems, processes and indeed culture supports the business conduct and outcomes that would stand up to external scrutiny in the future circumstances that strong legal protections are available to employees who draw attention to wrongdoing and misconduct.”

The bill “will provide for an overarching legislative framework for good faith reporting and protected disclosure on a uniform basis for all sectors of the economy covering the public and private sectors” including the Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces.

Concluding, the Minister added the legislation “presents organisations with a significant external legal benchmark against which they can measure and assess key conduct and behaviours that lead to long-term organisational and business stability and sustainability.”

Dáil

April 24	April 25	April 26
<p>2pm Questions (Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform)</p> <p>3.15pm Leaders Questions</p> <p>3.36pm Questions (Taoiseach)</p> <p>4.36pm Order of Business</p> <p>5.06pm Topical Issues</p> <p>Motion re: PQ Rota Change (Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Department of Defence) (without debate)</p> <p>Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2012 Second Stage resumed (Department of Social Protection)</p> <p>Motion re: Committee Stage of Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2012 (Department of Social Protection)</p> <p>Private Members Business</p>	<p>10.30am Leaders Questions</p> <p>10.51am Order of Business</p> <p>Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2012 Committee and Remaining Stages (Department of Social Protection)</p> <p>1.30pm SOS</p> <p>2.30pm Questions (Minister for Social Protection)</p> <p>3.45pm Topical issues</p> <p>4.33pm Morning business continued</p> <p>7.30pm Private Members Business</p> <p>Afternoon business continued</p>	<p>10.30am Leaders Questions</p> <p>10.51am Order of Business</p> <p>11.11am Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2012 Committee and Remaining Stages Resumed</p> <p>3.42pm Statements re: Government's Proposals for the Establishment of Irish Water and Water Metering Programme (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government)</p> <p>5.42pm Topical Issues</p> <p>6.30pm Questions (Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation)</p>

Seanad

April 23	April 24	April 25	April 26
<p>2.30pm Order of Business</p> <p>3.45pm Thirtieth Amendment of the Constitution (Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union) Bill 2012 – Second Stage [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade]</p>	<p>10.30am Order of Business</p> <p>11.45am Thirtieth Amendment of the Constitution (Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union) Bill 2012 – Committee and Remaining Stages [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade]</p> <p>3pm Statements on the Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning Matters and Payments [Minister for Housing and Planning]</p>	<p>10.30am Order of Business</p> <p>11.45am Competition (Amendment) Bill 2012 – Committee Stage [Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation]</p> <p>2.30pm Road Safety Authority (Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness) Bill 2012 – Report and Final Stages</p> <p>3.30pm Statements on Transport [Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport]</p> <p>5pm Private Members Business</p>	<p>10.30am Order of Business</p> <p>11.45am Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2012 – Second Stage (Minister for Social Protection)</p> <p>3pm Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2012 – Committee Stage [Minister for Social Protection]</p>
April 27			
<p>9.30am Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2012 – Report and Final Stages [Minister for Social Protection]</p> <p>12.30pm Protection of Employees (Temporary Agency Workers) Bill 2011 – Report and Final Stages [Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation]</p>			

Committee Meetings

April 24	April 25	April 26
<p>2 pm Communications, Natural Resources and Agriculture Committee Room 3, Leinster House AGENDA: Private Meeting</p> <p>2 pm Education and Skills (Sub-Committee) Committee Room 2, Leinster House AGENDA: 2012 Revised Estimates for Public Services - Vote 26 (Education and Skills)</p> <p>2.15 pm Environment, Transport, Culture and the Gaeltacht Committee Room 4, Leinster House AGENDA: (i) Scrutiny of EU legislative proposals: COM(2011)931; and COM(2012)43; and (ii) Utilising the Arts to combat disadvantage among the young, the old and socially disadvantaged and to encourage their greater integration and social inclusion within local communities [Officials from the Departments of Environment, Community and Local Government and from Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht]</p>	<p>9.30 am Jobs, Social Protection and Education Committee Room 3, Leinster House AGENDA: Unemployment and Youth Unemployment Session 1. 9.45 am [Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE) and the National Youth Council of Ireland]; and Session 2. 11 am approx [Mr Seán Moloney, Assistant Area Officer, Dublin City Council; Mr Joe Garland, Manager, Ballyfermot Civic Centre; and Mr Ciaran Reid, Manager, Ballyfermot – Chapelizod Partnership]</p> <p>10 am Communications, Natural Resources and Agriculture Committee Room 2, Leinster House AGENDA: The Post Office network [Mr Donal Connell, CEO, An Post]</p> <p>10.30 am Environment, Transport, Culture and the Gaeltacht Committee Room 4, Leinster House AGENDA: Engagement with (i) Ms Breda Collins, Chairman, Irish Water Safety; and (ii) Dr Michelle Norris, Chairman Designate, Housing Finance Agency</p> <p>2 pm Sub-Committee on the Referendum on the Intergovernmental Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (Sub-Committee of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs) Committee Room 3, Leinster House AGENDA: Module 2 - The Reaction of Irish Society to the Treaty (resumed) [Mr Gerry Adams, TD, Leader of Sinn Féin]</p> <p>3.30 pm Finance (Sub-Committee) Committee Room 4, Leinster House AGENDA: 2012 Revised Estimates for Public Services - Vote 7 (Office of the Minister for Finance); Vote 8 (Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General); Vote 9 (Office of the Revenue Commissioners); and Vote 10 (Office of the Appeal Commissioners). [Minister for Finance]</p>	<p>10 am Members' Interests of Dáil Éireann Committee Room 2, Leinster House AGENDA: Private Meeting</p> <p>10 am Public Accounts Committee Room 1, Leinster House AGENDA: (i) Business of the Committee; and (ii) 2010 Annual Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General: Chapter 23: Global Irish Economic Forum; Chapter 24: Official Development Assistance; 2010 Appropriation Accounts: Vote 28: Foreign Affairs;</p> <p>10.30 am Communications, Natural Resources and Agriculture Committee Room 4, Leinster House AGENDA: Our Ocean Wealth [Representatives from Bord Iascaigh Mhara]</p> <p>11.30 am Health and Children Committee Room 2, Leinster House AGENDA: Tackling Childhood Obesity - the medical profession's perspective [Professor Carlos Blanco, Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin]</p> <p>2 pm Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform Committee Room 4, Leinster House AGENDA: Overview of the Fiscal Assessment Report (April 2012) [Representatives of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council]</p>

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