Last journey | Patient to prisoner

One cruel regime replaced by another

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Glory days

Nine in a row for brilliant Ballygunner

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# EU plan to pay energy firms millions

Monday, September 12, 2022

■ Bid to stabilise sector with public funds despite firms' soaring profits

**Paul Hosford** Political Correspondent

The Government could be asked to give tens of millions to retail energy companies in a bid to stabilise the sector, despite soaring prices and record profits.

The optics of any financial assistance for energy companies would be bad for the Government at a time when half of households are facing crippling bills.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leven last week outlined a number of measures that the EU will take to tackle rising energy costs. Among these is the loosening of State aid rules to allow governments to give money to energy companies that are suffering

liquidity issues. The issue was discussed at an emergency meeting of EU energy ministers on Friday. Sources said the European Commission could make its final proposals as early as tomorrow. One source said EU ministers were keen to avoid companies having to access lenders of last resort.

such as central banks. Senior Government sources were keen to stress that the plan would see retail energy firms helped due to concern about the amount of money they have to keep as collateral on wholesale gas

At least two of these firms have told the Government the reserve requirements required for the purchase of gas are impacting liquidity.

One senior minister said the Government will have a windfall tax on electricity generators "no matter what" but that the EU proposal stood to negate at least some of the money generated by a windfall tax on larger-thannormal profits.

Ministers said they were "not aware" of any strings to be attached to the funding, but a Government source said there was a "keen awareness" of the optics of giving public money to firms

whose prices have risen. However, senior sources said the EU's proposal to cap revenues of non-carbonproducing generators would see funds put directly towards helping customers

as prices rise. Energia, which last week

became the latest energy company to announce a price hike, warned the Government in August that there is a risk that Irishbased retailers could face the prospect of not having the ability to purchase available

gas due to "massive advance

collateral payments" being

made before gas is supplied. The Energia letter does not ask for support, but urges the Government to engage with the sector in order to ensure the market does not "malfunction". The letter says that the wholesale price of gas has risen 10-fold in the last year. While this increases overheads for retail providers, it also adds to the amount of collateral they have to pay in advance.

Energia's price increase followed Electric Ireland's latest hike of 26.7% for electricity and 37.5% for gas, hitting 1.1m customers and coming after similar increases by other providers. ECB president Christine Lagarde on Friday ruled out

using ECB money to support energy firms. Sinn Féin energy spokes-

man Darren O'Rourke said liquidity supports and the windfall tax must go handin-hand, with a priority of lowering bills.

"In a lot of cases there would be public opposition to energy companies at a time of profits," he said. "If the EU proposes these liquidity supports, there has to be a windfall tax on hyper-normal

The Government is ruling nothing out in terms of cutting bills, Foreign Affairs Minister Simon Coveney said: "I think the overall package is what will count here, whether we look at price caps, whether we look at energy credits, all of that will add up, but what I can say is that these are unprecedented times and the financial response from the Government will be unprece-

dented as well. Meanwhile, Government sources have confirmed that a suite of measures aimed at small and medium businesses will be included in this month's budget.

These will include low cost loans similar to Brexit and Covid schemes, grants for exporters and another "broader" scheme.

### Sealed with a Lowry kiss



Shane Lowry kisses the trophy after his victory in the BMW PGA

of sport

Wentworth Golf Club, in England. SEE Sport: 15 Picture: Adam

## Minister has 'change of opinion' on abortion

Elaine Loughlin **Deputy Political Editor** 

A Fianna Fáil minister who campaigned for a no vote on abortion says her position has changed and she now believes the law does not go

far enough in this country.

Anne Rabbitte, who was among a group of Fianna Fáil TDs and senators who posed for a now-infamous picture ahead of the 2018 referendum, admits she was out of touch with her electorate who voted overwhelmingly in favour of repealing the Eighth Amendment.

In a candid interview with the Irish Examiner, the

ities said she believes her outspoken approach to various issues could see her overlooked when it comes to further promotion within

the party and to Cabinet. Ms Rabbitte, who has publicly criticised the HSE on a number of issues, said she "absolutely" believes her straight-talking approach may work against her in December's expected reshuffle.

"I'd love to hold onto being a minister, and one doesn't know because there are some very, very capable people in all backbenches," she said. "I am one step away from a backbench and I'm



Anne Rabbitte: Straight talk may hurt my reshuffle chances.

one step away from a senior position. So I'm in a very vulnerable position.'

she said her opinion has now changed after being 'amazed" by the elderly women of Ireland who voted in favour of providing access to terminations, and has also been influenced by her two teenage daughters.

"It just didn't happen that there was a light-bulb mo-ment," she said. "People have amazed me. Women that I would meet in my own area, that would be in their 80s, would turn to me and say: 'Yes, I voted yes because I remember the marriage bar, and I remember the mother and baby homes, and I know what happened and women would have their own say.'

"What also amazed me is my own two daughters one is 19 and one is under 18. My youngest regularly would keep me in check and perhaps that's where I have come to that position, that actually it's OK to change your opinion and it's OK to

let people know." She added that altering your views shows that you are "in touch" and listening to people.

"I thought I was in touch with my electorate, perhaps I thought I was representing their views," she said. "My

accepted repealing the Eighth, and I was behind the

While Ms Rabbitte would not comment on the current review of abortion legislation in Ireland, she said: "Where couples are given news that perhaps the baby won't survive, and it's clinically the opinion of the gynecologist, we have to leave the choice of their healthcare to the couples themselves.

"I do think it's wrong that they have to leave the State. "I still don't think we have addressed that piece of it."

News: 4

### More people on wait lists for inpatient cataract treatment

**Neil Michael** 

The number of people booked for inpatient day care cataract procedures is on the increase, according to the latest inpatient waiting list figures.

Most of the hospitals that carry out these procedures say there are now more people waiting than there were three months ago. In June, Health Minister

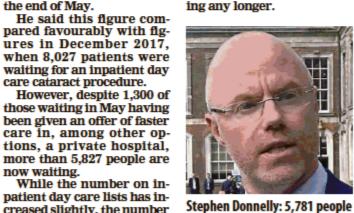
Stephen Donnelly said 5,781 people were waiting as of the end of May. He said this figure compared favourably with figures in December 2017,

waiting for an inpatient day care cataract procedure. However, despite 1,300 of those waiting in May having been given an offer of faster care in, among other options, a private hospital, more than 5,827 people are

now waiting. While the number on inpatient day care lists has increased slightly, the number of people on outpatient ophthalmology lists continues to fall.

At the end of May, the number was 38,713 but it had fallen to 37,449 by the end of August, according to the latest National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF)

figures. The 1,264 reduction in those on outpatient waiting lists for ophthalmology covers a period in which around 500 to 600 peopletravelled to the North to receive treatment rather than wait-



were waiting at the end of May.

Ukraine recovers 3,000sq km in counter-offensive

The NTPF's validation process — which includes people being removed from a list if they or their GP do not reply within a month to a HSE letter asking them if they still want their cataracts done — also results in

falling figures. As reported last week, the NTPF and the HSE have successfully removed 49,500 patients from all waiting lists this year as of the end of August.

In response to questions last week about rising lists following the latest NTPF figures, the Department of Health said: "Increased demands associated with emergency department presentations are putting further pressure on elective access.

The latest inpatient day care figures for cataract treatment come as a bus service to Belfast started by Independent TDs Michael Collins and Danny Healy-Rae marked its 100th journey to





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Referee abused

An investigation is underway in Kerry after an under-11 hurling match operating under 'silent sideline' and 'no score-keeping' guidelines — was abandoned early in the first half because of unacceptable abuse from the sideline.

Monday Sport: 2

IRISH EXAMINER 12.09.22



#### Karl Ritter and Hanna Arhirova Ukrainian forces have

pushed their counter-offensive against Russia in the country's east, exploiting quick gains they made in a week of fighting that has

sharply changed the course of the conflict. Ukraine's quick action to reclaim Russia-occupied areas in the north-eastern Kharkiv region forced Moscow to withdraw its troops to prevent them from being surrounded, leaving behind significant numbers of weapons and munitions in a hasty retreat. The war marked 200 days yesterday.

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy mocked the Russians in a video late are now about 50km away on Saturday, saying: "The Russian army in these days from the border with Russia. is demonstrating the best it

can do, showing its back." Yesterday, he posted a video of Ukrainian soldiers hoisting the national flag over Chkalovske, another town they reclaimed from the Russians Ukraine's military chief,

General Valerii Zaluzhnyy, said Ukraine has liberated about 3,000sq km since the beginning of September. He said Ukrainian troops

The Russians' pullback

forces since they thwarted a Russian attempt to seize the capital, Kyiv, at the start of the nearly seven-month war. Ukraine's attack in the

marked the biggest battle-

field success for Ukrainian

Kharkiv region came as a surprise for Moscow, which had relocated many of its troops from the area to the south in expectation of the main Ukrainian counteroffensive there.

**Editorial: 8** World: 16



Thursday in September and October. Rates from €960 in



#### News

## 'Actually, it's OK to change your opinion'

Anne Rabbitte posed for an infamous picture during the campaign on the Eighth Amendment. Her views have since changed, she tells Deputy Political

Editor **Elaine Loughlin** 

NNE RABBITTE jokingly refers to herself as a "tough old bird" but is acutely aware that many will not be aware of the context behind the description.

After her husband Paddy suddenly died in 2011, she stopped going to Mass. Not because of any loss of faith but instead, faced with grief, three children under the age of nineto raise, and a job to hold down, something had to give.

give.
Eleven years on and the disabilities minister still becomes emotional when she finds herself drifting into conversation about that time.

"When Paddy died, I made a decision that there was a part of me that had to mind me, so I actually forfeit Mass for me," she says. "I couldn't be getting up every morning of the week doing the routine—there had to be a morning that wasn't routine. So, I actually said: 'Well, if I'm a good person, that's OK, the kids come first.'

"I made that decision, based on the fact that I couldn't stretch it any more ... three young kids, you know

"There was no point in stressing the kids out, getting us on for the 11 o'clock Mass, everybody looking perfect. I dreaded every last minute of it because I was too bloody exhausted and resenting it, whereas I would prefer actually to do something good."

Keeping up appearances is something that "doesn't wash" with the Galway East



Anne Rabbitte: 'It's so hard to succeed in politics, so you're always trying to be the best of what you can be, be it a TD, a councillor, or a minister.'

TD and yet, as her children have grown into teenagers and young adults, the family's personal loss is something she has rarely spoken about.

"It's funny, on a national basis people don't realise that I have been widowed with three kids and I don't talk about it. I'm quite happy not to talk about it because my kids always say to me 'we've nothing to do with your job', which in turn actually means: 'Do not talk about us.'

"I suppose I went into politics with people not underestimating what depth or strength of character I had or what my circumstances were."

In entering politics, a life Ms Rabbitte would never have chosen if her late husband was still alive, she could have used her platform to represent other bereaved parents, but she "would have hated people to think of it as a sympathy conversation".

She says: "Perhaps as a mother, you double down in your private life. And you park it. It's so hard to succeed in politics, so you're always trying to be the best of what you can be, be it a TD, a councillor, or a minister."

Ms Rabbitte is acutely aware of the struggles facing every part of society due to spiralling inflation. Asked if she worries the

cost-of-living pressures on families will result in an increase in mental health issues and suicide, similar to what was seen after the financial crash, she responds: 'People are fragile. Certain things we lost coming out of Covid, like people are under pressure, be it young people, it's not that they've lost years, they've lost how to connect with people. They've lost confidence in themselves and they bring that into college

"Then you have the parents who are worried about providing in a very tight

space at the moment.

"It's not just one part of society that is actually under pressure at the moment. It's right across; from the businessperson to the family, the single mom trying to put the kids out to school, or the family that has a child with additional needs or the older parent, the carers — they're all under pressure. But that doesn't mean to say the Government won't respond and is not listening."

Ms Rabbitte puts it that "September should be the January" because for a lot of people it heralds the start of "pressure season".

"It's the start of the expectations. It's how many Fridays to Christmas — all that adds into the psyche and yes, it does prey on people's wellbeing"

However, Ms Rabbitte believes that, unlike during the recession, when suicide rates rose by 15% in Ireland, people are more open about talking about mental health, while education has been

key.
"The communication
around mental health, being
able to seek advice, being
able to talk to people — and
probably men are the worst
and reaching out for it, still."

HIS interview had been arranged not to speak about grief, but another personal issue: Ms Rabbitte's view on abortion.

She was among a group of Fianna Fáil TDs and senators who posed for an infamous no campaign picture ahead of the Repeal referendum in 2018.

But opinions evolve and Ms Rabbitte now believes the current abortion legislation does not go far enough, pointing out that couples who are told their child will not survive are still being forced to travel abroad.

Does she regret taking part in the picture?

"That's a photograph at a



Anne Rabbitte with Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin

point in time and has stood still since, that's where that is. But that doesn't mean to say that Anne Rabbitte's opinions have stood still in

Although she "willingly stood in that day", she says at the time she was relatively new to Leinster House and wasn't reared in a political Picture: Moya Nolan

mily. "I've made mistakes along

the way, not just with that photograph, I've made mistakes. But, at the same time, if you don't learn from it, or if you don't be open about your opinion, and let people know or update your profile as to actually this is where I'm at at the moment, people

will never know."
Ms Rabbitte now sees
abortion as a women's health
issue and says all women
should have access to the
best healthcare possible.

There was no lightbulb moment," she says, but speaking to older women in her community, as well as her two daughters, led to a shift in outlook.

"People have amazed me. Women that I would meet in my own area that would be in their eighties would turn to me and say 'I voted yes because I remember the marriage bar and I remember the mother and baby homes and I know what happened and

don't realise that I have been widowed with three kids and I don't talk about it. I'm quite happy not to talk about it

yes, I think it's right that women would have their own say' — they amazed me.

"What also amazed me is my own two daughters, one is 19 and one is under 18. My youngest regularly — now she has a very strong opinion — would keep me in check and perhaps that's where I have come to that position that actually it's OK to change your opinion and it's OK to let people know."

Ms Rabbitte says that altering your views shows that you are "in touch" and lis-

tening to people.

"I thought I was in touch with my electorate, perhaps I thought I was representing their views. My electorate overwhelmingly accepted repealing the Eighth and maybe I was behind the curve. They were ahead of

And so, what next for the self-proclaimed 48-year-old "tough old bird"?

In her role in the Department of Health, she has had her fair share of battles, both public and private, with officials in the HSE, but won't be changing her approach.

December is likely to see

December is likely to see changes among the ministerial ranks, but Ms Rabbitte "absolutely" believes her outspoken personality may limit her progression.

"I'd love to hold on to being a minister and one doesn't know because there are some very, very capable people in all backbenches. I am one step away from a backbench and I'm one step away from a senior position. So I'm in a very vulnerable position." Trish Examiner **Anthony Daly** Wounded Limerick look like they need a rest

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**Encore une fois** O'Gara's La Rochelle set up Leinster rematch



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Nifty fifty Haaland's landmark goal as City go top



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#### In the face of adversity



Jamie Barron of Waterford clashes with Brian Roche of Cork during the Munster ship match at Páirc Uí Chaoimh yesterday. SEE: Sport, Pages 2&3

Fitzgerald/

## Ryan: Fast fashion is like smoking

Political Editor

Future generations will be horrified by fast fashion and our current consumption habits in the same way as we now look back at how smoking was once acceptable everywhere, the Green Party leader has warned.

Eamon Ryan said generations to come will wonder how we let our waterways become so polluted, and will question our overreliance on

Mr Ryan has also warned that, as a country that sells itself as being a green destination both for tourism and food production, Ireland is at risk of being accused of "greenwashing" if we allow our natural ecosystems

■ 'Generations will wonder how we let waterways get so polluted

and biodiversity to decline

In an interview to mark the start of the Irish Examiner's sustainability month coverage, Mr Ryan said: "I think fast fashion is one of the issues that people will, in the future, look back on.

"It's like, why did we allow smoking on the bus? Well, because, you know, no one thought to maybe say: 'Sorry, you're killing me here too.' So it's the same thing — you're not blaming anyone on the bus going back to that time, it's more just that what was societally accepted will change."

Fast fashion, referring to garments produced and sold at cheap prices, has wideranging environmental impacts. The fashion industry accounts for about 8%-10% of global carbon emissions, and nearly 20% of wastewater, and 85% of all textiles go to dumps each year.

Mr Ryan added: "The way we really just buy something, use it three times and then throw it out, that's an example of that disposability. I think we will look back at that and think that it's not as classy as buying something really good and wearing it a hundred times."

Governments must ensure that there are high environmental standards, high employment standards, and higher production standards in place, as the onus cannot be on consumers to choose items that have the least impact on the planet.

The Green Party leader raised serious concerns that there are now just 20 rivers that have "pristine" conditions, down from more than 500 in the 1980s.

The Environmental Protection Agency has raised concern about the impact of wastewater and agricultural runoff in our water quality in multiple reports in recent

He said: "One of the things that will really jump out [to did we allow our waters be so polluted?

"How did we go from a system where we had pristine waters to where they were all polluted? How did we miss

"I grew up in an Ireland where those rivers were clean. I grew up in a street where you played on the streets, everyone did. I know that sounds a bit old-fashioned, but it's true.

"It wasn't as if it was all rosy, there are lots of things that are better now. It's just if we let nature go, that's kind of a fundamental loss that undermines everything.'

He said Ireland is at risk of being accused of "greenwashing" as we are selling

"When Joe Biden was here, his speeches were full of the island of 40 shades of green, and if you look at any of our tourism advertising, or if you look at our food advertising, we are all the time selling ourselves on the basis that we have this beautiful island, which we do, but we have lost a huge amount of nature, we have a real problem in not having looked after our land," said Mr Ryan. "We do have a family farming pastoral system, but we just have to be careful we don't lose it."

News: 4







'A trip to the checkout is now as dreaded as a trip to the dentist' News: 3

## Online registration of births and deaths to be introduced

Elaine Loughlin Political Editor

Families will be able to register births and deaths online for the first time and official acknowledgment of stillbirths is to be expanded under new reforms.

Social Protection Minister Heather Humphreys has drafted new legislation to give people greater flexibility when it comes to registering major life events.

Under the changes,

families will be able to register a death where a coroner's inquest has not yet been concluded and the time in which a death must be registered will also be cut from the current three-month timeframe to 28 days.

Campaigners have been calling for changes to the system of registering stillbirths to support families who have experienced the loss of a child during pregnancy, while still safeguarding the privacy of families.

The Register of Stillbirths will now be expanded to other relatives of the stillborn child where currently only the parents may search the register and obtain a cer-

Ms Humphreys said: "Parents and advocacy groups have lobbied for the changes to the stillbirth criteria and for broadening access to the Register of Stillbirths and I am very happy to support them by bringing forward the necessary legislation."

the criteria for the registration of stillbirths to reflect advances in clinical practices and recommendations by the Department of Health.

Current criteria permit registration where the stillborn child weights at least 500 grammes or reaches a gestational age of 24 weeks. The proposals look to re-

duce these thresholds to 400 grammes and 23 weeks respectively.

Other changes will also

registration process, which can create practical difficulties for families who are seeking to manage the affairs of the deceased person.

"I am also bringing forward changes that will enable deaths that are referred to a coroner to be registered before the coroner has determined the cause of death,' Ms Humphreys said.

"This will help speed up the death registration pro-

enable families of the deceased to register the death and receive a death certifi-

"Currently, the next-ofkin only have access to an interim coroner's certifi-

The Civil Registration (Electronic Registration) Bill 2023 will also enable families to register births and deaths online for the first time.

Since the current civil registration system was introduced in 1864, families have been required to attend before a registrar in person in order to register a birth or

Ms Humphreys said the bill, which was approved by Cabinet last week, will modernise the Civil Registration Service and will bring Ire-land in line with death registration practices in other countries to ensure that deaths are notified and registered at the earliest oppor-



Heather Humphreys has drafted new legislation.

# State 'like corporates in its legal approach'

#### Bacik: State often twists knife on people at their most vulnerable

Elaine Loughlin Political Editor

The Government has been called on to end the State's current approach to legal cases, "which is indistin-guishable from any faceless

private corporate entity". The Labour Party said new legislation must be introduced to require the attorney general to represent the public interest.

The way in which the State defends cases was recently criticised after details emerged of a legal strategy toward legacy nursing home charges and disability pay-

However, a report from Attorney General (AG) Rossa Fanning found the State had acted "prudently" to settle a small number of claims involving care in private nursing homes rather than risking an adverse outcome in "which could have provoked many more historic cases, all for the account of the taxpayer".

Labour Party leader Ivana Bacik said that rather than trying to make Ireland a better, fairer place, in litigation like this, advice given to the Government by the AG places a focus on "protecting Government departments' budgets" and "avoiding any concession of liability".

"At present, the State approaches litigation in a way which is indistinguishable from any faceless private corporate entity — it is a war of attrition against those who dare to sue it," said Ms Bacik

"We have seen it in special educational needs cases; in immigration; in medicolegal cases; in cases taken by those excluded from state redress, including survivors of sexual abuse in schools and those affected by the appalling thalidomide scandal; and in recent revelations about the removal of disability allowance payments from people in institutional care. When people are at their most vulnerable, often it is the State which twists the knife."

Ms Bacik has introduced a new bill to reform the Office of the AG to ensure that any legal advice provided to the Government has due regard to the vindication of people's

Pointing to the recent lifting of the eviction ban, she said the Government had "leaned heavily" on the advice of the AG, without publishing that advice in full.

"Unfortunately, we have seen several recent occasions where the Government has chosen to simply hide behind the confidentiality of its correspondence with the AG, instead of facing up to the political reasons for which it made a certain decision," said Ms Bacik.

table instance of this was Government's claim that a temporary extension of the eviction ban might be unconstitutional, a claim which stretches credulity. People in Ireland deserve a Government that has their backs, and it deserves an explanation when the Government chooses to ignore the evidence and pursue policies which may cause them harm. Our bill will go some of the way to ensure they receive that accountability."

She said that with recordbreaking homelessness, a dearth of housing supply, unaffordable rents, and adult children living in their parents' box rooms, extending the eviction ban would have been the better course of action to protect people in housing insecurity.

"That's where this bill comes in. It would ensure that the Office of the Attorney General works in the best interest of the public."

### **Sweet music**



The academic women's choir from University of Tartu in Estonia performing during the Cobh Choral Trail at the Cobh Bandstand in John F Kennedy Park as part of the Cork International Choral Festival.

## 'Investment in national parks needed'

Elaine Loughlin

Political Editor

Green Party leader Eamon Ryan has not ruled out the compulsory purchase of land as a way of dramatically increasing the size of Ireland's national parks. Mr Ryan has said he

wants the State to begin buying up significant tracts of land that adjoin areas such as Killarney National Park. He said farmers will be en-

couraged to plant parts of their land in forestry to meet Ireland's carbon reduction targets. Mr Ryan said native tem-

perate rainforests need to be restored at scale if we are to protect biodiversity and native species.

"I think there are areas where we can start extending our national parks and creating really special areas," Mr Ryan said in an interview to mark the Irish Examiner's sustainability month.



Eamon Ryan wants the State to buy up land that adjoin areas such as Killarney National Park.

"We will put money into that, we need to.

Mr Ryan highlighted 1,900 acres of private land in Glenasmole Valley, near the Dublin-Wicklow border, which was put on the market by Nama in 2016.

"I suggested to Michael Ring, who was the minister at the time 'surely we should buy that', which we did for a really good price.

"And now that land is an

Irish Examiner SUSTAINABILITY MONTH May 6 - June 8, 2023

extended part of the Wicklow National Park, Dublin Uplands National Park.

"We can start to really look at rewilding places like that. It gives us not just a kind of a beautiful island to live on, but it gives us resilience, it gives us biodiver-

"These indigenous forests, these indigenous trees have real advantage for us in terms of ability to cope with

Only 2% of the country is covered by native woodland and, according to The Plant Atlas 2020, more than half of Irish native plant species are in decline.

Mr Ryan said he would not be against the buying up of land through compulsory purchase order in order to restore biodiversity

However, he said he does not want to "scare" farmers and other landowners. It would have to work in a way that people have a sense of pride in being part of.

"I am discussing this with my colleagues, and I think we will start to see planning for much, much more ambitious plans around particularly the likes of national parks," said Mr Ryan.

"That's absolutely where we probably have huge potential and potential I mean, it's not just from tourism of local recreation, there's also a value to nature.

"We are selling ourselves

to be green, in reality, if we

want to do that. "So that type of model where you're looking at where we can purchase land and extend parks and really develop much bigger, more dramatic park areas. I think that absolutely makes sense and is where are we will

look to go. He said there is now a "real opportunity" to reverse the damage that has been done to our environment over the last 50 years.

Mr Ryan said young farmers are the "frontline climate heroes of the future" and must be given financial

incentives to diversify.
"The are the one who will be improving water quality, restoring soil health, restoring insect and bird life, the people who manage our land are going to be the key people and we have to pay for that, pay them, through a whole different variety of sources," he said.

### Zoned land tax mapout today

Sean Murray

More landowners will find out today if they are subject to a new zoned-land tax which the Government claims is an "important component" of boosting housing

The 3% tax is not aimed at raising revenue but to act as an incentive to activate land that could be used for hous-

ing, according to ministers. Dozens of appeals have been made to An Bord Pleanála from landowners who have been included in the original draft map of land

subject to the tax. Today, supplemental zoned-land maps are being published to include further lands identified to fall within the scope of the tax.

Minister for Housing Darragh O'Brien said: "It's estimated that only one-sixth of residentially zoned land is activated for housing during a local authority's six-year development plan period.

"We need to see more suitable land which is serviced and available for housing unlocked for the delivery of

The Residential Zoned Land Tax is a new tax which the Government says is aimed at increasing housing supply by activating lands zoned for residential development for housing.

landowners to use existing planning permissions for

It is charged at a rate of 3% of the land's market value, and operates on a self-assessment basis.

Local authorities initially published a draft map of land falling within the scope of the tax last November, and people will now have until June 1 to make an application to their local authority regarding the supplemen-

In the last two weeks, An Bord Pleanála has received over two dozen appeals in Cork alone related to inclusion on this register to pay

tal map being published

the new tax. The Government has said homeowners will not have to pay this tax if they own a dwelling which appears on their local authorities' map, where the property is subject to the local property tax.

If a homeowner owns such a dwelling, where the land/ gardens/yards attached to it Summer shows § The best TV, books,

and gigs this May

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On your bike How sustainable

are our politicians?

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'It's not over' Arsenal still in title fight, insists Arteta

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Flights grounded by French strikes Tánaiste: Be

Pan-Europe air traffic control system urged as unrest strands hundreds

Tuesday, May 2, 2023

Liz Dunphy, Pádraig Hoare, and Angelique Chrisafis

There have been fresh calls for a pan-European air traffic control system after French strikes caused flight cancellations for hundreds of passengers flying into and from Cork, Dublin, and Shannon airports yesterday.

Hundreds of flights across Europe were cancelled due to long-running industrial action by French air traffic controllers.

France saw some of the most militant May Day workers' protests in the world yesterday, with violent scenes in Paris in particular.

French workers and unions, including the air traffic controllers, are angry at Emmanuel Macron's move to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64.

Calling for the unified flight control system, Ireland South MEP Billy Kelleher said: "These strikes have profound implications across Europe, with hardpressed families who have no hand, act, or part in French air traffic control issues the ones who bear the brunt.

"The fact that air traffic controllers in one country can wholly and disproportionately affect the entire continent cannot be acceptable any longer. The EU

must act once and for all." However, travel expert Eoghan Corry said holidaymakers should not hold out hopes for such a universal air traffic control system any time soon.

"That would be the magic wand to wave to solve the issue but it has been talked about for 20 years," he said.

"There is no reason technically or from a safety point of view that it cannot be done.



An injured police officer is evacuated from May Day clashes in Paris following weeks of public outrage over France's increased retirement age.

However, it means the 27 EU member states agreeing and the French in particular will not do so.

In Paris, the trade unionled demonstration began peacefully with many families joining in, holding banners calling for social justice and demanding Mr Macron resign.

However, on the edges of the march, police fired teargas and clashed with groups of young men dressed in black. Projectiles, bins, and petrol bombs were thrown at police. One officer was seriously injured by a petrol

bomb and treated in hospital

There were 290 arrests across France by 5pm, with over 60 in Paris, and more than 100 police officers in-

The ramifications of union unrest in France could cause further woes for Irish holidaymakers throughout the summer if no breakthrough is found.

Hundreds of flights to the most popular holiday destinations pass through French airspace.

Most of the flights affected in Ireland by yesterday's action were to and from French airports, including Paris,

Bordeaux, and Carcassonne. However, other airports, such as Lanzarote in the Canary Islands, were also hit.

This was the 51st such strike in recent months. Currently, France can use minimum service legislation to protect local French flights during air traffic controller strikes but flights passing over French airspace have no such protection.

"This is completely unacceptable," said Ryanair chief executive Michael O'Leary. "France is using minimum service legislation to protect its local French fights, but all the cancellations then are

being disproportionately passed on to English flights, Írish flights, Italian flights, Spanish flights, German

Ryanair recently launched a petition calling on Europe to protect overflights from being cancelled in French airspace. The petition has more than 644,000 signa-

Concerns have also been raised about staffing short-ages in Irish air traffic control, with some fears that shortages could disrupt travel this summer unless urgently addressed.

Dublin airspace closed

Picture: Pierre Crom/Getty

briefly on multiple occasions this year due to air traffic controller staff shortages. There are currently 245 operational air traffic controllers 26 less than one year ago at a time of increasing air

"There is essentially a mismatch between the current staffing compliment and the growing demand on the air traffic control service," said a spokesman for Fórsa union, which represents public service staff.

Fórsa will be meeting with management on May 10 specifically to look at a process for staffing, he said.

## 'clear-eyed' about Ćhina's objectives

Elaine Loughlin

The Government and the private sector need to be "realistic" and "clear-eyed" about China's strategic objectives and their implications for Ireland, Tánaiste Micheál Martin will warn today.

Mr Martin is expected to lay out Ireland's stance on China in a keynote address this afternoon. He will strongly advise the private sector, academics, and other stakeholders to increase their awareness of their level of exposure and to "derisk" where necessary.

It comes as staff at government departments and agencies have been told to remove social media app TikTok from their official devices following a detailed risk review by the National Cyber Security Centre.

IDA Ireland has also confirmed it will be following the advice to delete the video-sharing app from devices over fears that data could be sent to the Chinese government, despite the social media platform being a client company.

The Tánaiste will say Ireland's engagement with China will be linked to its approach to Ukraine, its commitment to the multilateral system, and our strong desire to partner with it on global challenges and will be anchored in Ireland's enduring mission to preserve and promote human rights.

He will use his address at the Royal Irish Academy's Annual International Affairs Conference to say this country will not be "naive nor silent" when we see evidence of core principles of the UN Charter being undermined by China. He will acknowledge that

€2.40 (£1.70 in N. Ireland)

China and Ireland's different world views, values, and interests will inevitably shape how we engage with one another.

**European Commission** president Ursula von der Leyen recently said the EU's relationship with China is not black and white but it is not in our interest to fully decouple from China. She instead suggested diplomatic and economic de-risking.

Mr Martin will elaborate that, for Ireland, de-risking means developing our economic and systemic resilience to, in turn, protect our values and interests.

He will say the process of de-risking is not confined to the Government and that other stakeholders, while building relationships with China, should de-risk where necessary. "This does not mean turn-

ing our backs on an economic, diplomatic, and cultural relationship with China," Mr Martin will say.

"There are many mutually beneficial ties that we can nourish and grow. We will continue to support many of our businesses in their engagement with China, and to work with the Chinese companies established in Ireland to create iobs and build prosperity.'

Mr Martin will strongly reject the framing by some of a "west against the rest" scenario and will tell the gathering that Ireland's starting point for analysing China's global ambitions and engagements is whether it upholds the multilateral system with the UN Charter at its heart.

#### **Criticism of conditions** in prison for mentally ill

Mick Clifford

Chaplains have widely criticised the practice of imprisoning people with mental illness, often in wholly unsuitable environments.

In newly published reports, the chaplains in the State's 12 prisons repeatedly point out the prisons are accommodating a high proportion of people with mental health difficulties.

"Being confined to a small cell for hours every day when your mind is tortured is a terrible punishment," one report states.

The observation is among a number of criticisms of how the prison system is operating as seen by the chaplains who work within the prison environment.

Publication of the 2021 reports had been delayed for over a year, but they have

now been published online. A spokesperson for the Irish Prison Service said a number of recommendations from a recent mental health task force would "fundamentally improve mental health services for persons committed to custody with serious mental illness".

Among the observations

## made in the chaplains' re-

ports are: Lack of access to bereavement services, including the possibility of attending funerals of loved ones;

■ Absence of aftercare facilities for released prisoners, including the manner in which they are released. "The bags that prisoners are issued with to hold their property are the same bags that are used to contain rubbish in the prison system. What is that saying to human dignity?" the Dochas

chaplains report states; A system for trans prisoners in Limerick Prison in which the prisoners are confined to their cells for 23 hours a day:

■ The understaffing, employment conditions, and reduced pay for prison chaplains, whose function is to advocate for both prisoners and staff within the system.

The publication of the reports comes on the same weekend that Bishop Martin Hayes said that a recent visit to Mountjoy Prison demonstrated to him that the facility is "under huge pressure to cope with the demands placed on it".

### Ireland 'could be the ideal launch site for a spaceport'

Cormac O'Keeffe Security Correspondent

Ireland is an "ideal launching site" for a spaceport and it is of "paramount importance" that the State invest in the area given EU efforts to build up its own defence of space, a former senior army officer has said.

Retired brigadier general Peter O'Halloran said commercial firms are looking at locations on the south and west coast of Ireland as possible sites for a launchpad. The defence and security

of space has been added to traditional responsibilities of defending land, air, sea, and cyberspace. Last March, the European Commission issued a statement on a European Space Strategy for Security and Defence.

It said space systems and services — including satellites and ground-based infrastructure - are "crucial" for the functioning of society and economy, as well as security and defence.

With the recent "intensification" of threats to security, the EU has said it must act "to protect its space

deter hostile activities in space and strengthen its strategic posture and auton-

Mr O'Halloran, who is now vice chairman of Irish space firm Suas Aerospace, said space vehicles could be launched from Ireland for telecommunications, environmental monitoring, or medical experiments.

Addressing the Azure Forum for Contemporary Security Strategy, he said the EU is 10 years behind the "major space players" — the US, China, Russia, Japan, and India. However, he said the EU's space strategy will be a "game changer" in the



Peter O'Halloran: A potential spaceport 'needs State backing'.

IFA: Ryan's remarks on national parks are delusional

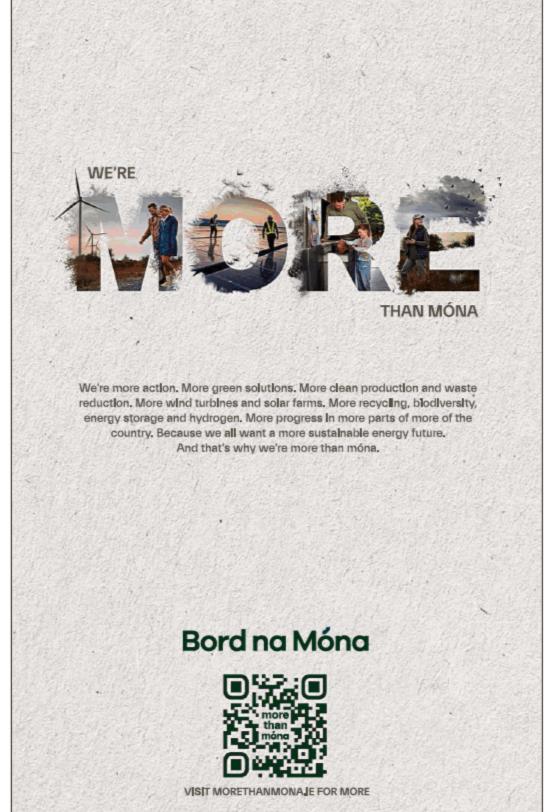
assets, defend its interests, future of military space activities with a common view for EU member states, with "enormous economic oppor-

tunity". A former director of the Defence Forces' Communications and Information Services Corps said the EU predicts that two space markets — earth observation and global navigation satellite systems — will grow by up 150% to €500bn per year

He later told the Irish Examiner: "There are loads of companies in Europe that need to have a facility of a launch pad, or a spaceport, and by and large they are all heading towards the Azores. The UK is now starting to set up spaceports, but they are now outside the EU. Ireland is ideal as a launching site."

He said studies have shown that such a facility is viable in Ireland but that it "needs financial backing and becomes something that is also supported by the

He said a spaceport must have a 2km radius free of built-up areas and would launch over water.



#### Ukrainians stay

A "pause" has been put on plans to move 80 Ukrainians from their lodgings in Caherciveen in Kerry to make way for international protection applicants.

IRISH EXAMINER

02.05.23

Recommended reta

and "delusional" remarks by

Elaine Loughlin

Farmers have reacted

strongly to "inflammatory"

Eamon Ryan, who has not ruled out compulsory purchases for national parks.

The Green Party leader told the Irish Examiner yesterday he wants the State to

creating really special areas.

begin buying up tracts of land that adjoin areas such as Killarney National Park. "I think there are areas where we can start extending our national parks and

said, adding he would not be against the compulsory purchase order (CPO) of land. IFA president Tim Cullinan said: "It is bad enough that Eamon Ryan wants to

I think we will put money

into that, we need to," he

use State funds to encourage the rewilding of land to take it out of production. Now he wants to use the State's powers to confiscate land from private citizens." He said use of CPOs would be an abuse of power.

"IFA will use every possible avenue to stop such a move. Just because Eamon Ryan is a Government Minister doesn't mean he 'owns the country'. We have a constitution, and every citizen has rights that cannot just be taken away by Eamon Ryan or any other citizen."

# Irish Examiner

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Ronan O'Gara

Barbarians inspired

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## Nine FG TDs mayquit before election

#### ■ Griffin and Stanton certain to step down amid feared exodus

urging him to change his

mind. However, he is among

a number of Fine Gael

members who have become

disillusioned with Mr Varad-

party who are just fed up,'

Griffin said: "I would not be

commenting at this stage on

the future. My focus is on

doing my job on behalf of my

It is expected that Mr

Griffin will make an an-

nouncement before the new

constituency boundaries are

announced, as he does not want his decision to be con-

flated with any changes that

"Many will be waiting

When asked about his own

political future, Cork East

TD Mr Stanton said: "Every-

one is waiting for the new

constituency boundaries, I

have made no announce-

a TD for 26 years, said: "The

election is around a year and

a half or two years away. I

am focused on my job at the

moment. I am working away

in the Dáil and in my consti-

One TD said he had drawn

up a list of red, amber, and

green TDs at the start of this

Dáil term, with the departed

Eoghan Murphy and Mr

McHugh on the red list,

along with Mr Griffin, Mr

Stanton, and Mr Durkan. On

the amber list are Mr

O'Dowd, Mr Flanagan, Mr

other man that might not go

Money&Jobs

"Frankie Feighan is an-

Creed, and Mr Phelan.

again," the TD said

Mr Stanton, who has been

ment about it."

constituents in Kerry.

"There are people in the

kar's leadership.

Elaine Loughlin Deputy Political Editor

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar is facing an electoral crisis with up to nine Fine Gael TDs now expected to stand down ahead of the next general election.

said one party senator. While family was provided In a massive blow to the party, Kerry TD Brendan as an explanation when Mr Griffin and Cork East repre-Griffin turned down a junior ministerial role offered by sentative David Stanton are now certain not to run. It is Mr Varadkar before Christthought Fine Gael general mas, those close to him say secretary John Carroll he also could not promise the visited Mr Griffin in his Taoiseach he would continue home at Christmas in a bid to in politics, which had been convince him to stand in the made a stipulation of any apnext election. However, pointment. Asked about a potential departure from politics, Mr sources close to Mr Griffin say he has made up his mind.

Fine Gael has already lost former Education Minister Joe McHugh who, last year, announced that he would not be standing for re-election.

It is expected that other members will also announce that they will not be running again. However, some are awaiting the constituency boundary redraws which are due to be published over the

While some, including Bernard Durkan, Michael Creed, Fergus O'Dowd, until July [when the new constituency boundaries are and Charlie Flanagan are published]. The likes of Paul viewed as having served a Kehoe will be looking at full career in politics, party what happens in Wexford, members have sounded Michael Creed is another alarm that others who are man who would be waiting. considered as being the There are all those dynamics "middle generation" in the at play," said one senior Fine Dáil are also questioning Gael source. their futures.

These include John Paul Phelan and Paul Kehoe, who were among the loyal supporters of Leo Varadkar and key figures in his leadership election.

"The departure of that middle generation would not be ideal. They would be the group who would provide continuity after the next generation," said one TD.

It is thought that Mr Griffin, who has been a TD since 2011, has told some party colleagues that having to spend considerable time away from his young sons has made him reflect on whether he will seek re-election.

Given the significant personal vote that Mr Griffin has always secured, it is not certain that any replacement candidate put forward by the party would win a seat in the competitive constituency.

Party colleagues have spoken with Mr Griffin

Life/Style

## A case of the bends



## Toddler dies after choking on grape

**Eoin English** 

Gardaí are treating as a tragic accident the death of a toddler in West Cork who choked to death on a grape, it is thought.

An autopsy took place on the remains of the two-and-ahalf-year-old, named locally as Joshua Odonker, at Cork University Hospital (CUH) yesterday to establish the

exact cause of death. While the results are not being made public, it is understood that Joshua got into difficulty while eating at home in Skibbereen on Wednesday evening and began choking after a windpipe

The alarm was raised just before 9pm and emergency services, including National Ambulance Service paramedics and gardaí, rushed to the scene in a housing estate near the town's post

Paramedics fought desperately to resuscitate him but he was pronounced dead at the scene

It is the second tragic fatality of a toddler in the Skibbereen area in less than

Gardaí confirmed that they attended a house in the town on Wednesday evening

grape got lodged in his following the sudden death will form a key part of Everybody is dumbfounded of a young boy

They said that they were treating the incident as a tragic accident and that foul play was not suspected in the boy's death. "The coroner [for West

post-mortem will be held at Cork University Hospital," a spokesman said. "Gardaí are currently treating the death as a tragic

Cork] has been notified and a

accident and foul play is not suspected. Owing to the tragic

nature of the incident no further information is

The results of the autopsy

the garda file which will now be prepared for the coroner's "It's hard to put into words An inquest into the boy's

death will be held in due It is understood that

Joshua's family is originally from Ghana and that they are relatively new arrivals in the town, and may have been living in the area for just a few months.

Local Independent county councillor Karen Coakley said that while the family was not widely known, the town has been rocked by the

"It's hard to comprehend.

really. The town is just devastated," she said.

how the family must be feeling given the tragedy and obviously our deepest condolences go out to them.'

Last January, a boy aged 18 months suffered fatal injuries after he was struck by a car in the driveway of a house in the Tralispean a few kilometres outside the

The boy was transferred by ambulance to Cork University Hospital.

However, he was pronounced dead a short time after arrival.

#### **'Danger** to life' in garda car ramming

Liam Heylin

Two charges of endangering life were brought against a man accused of ramming garda cars in Cork City when his partner and six children were in his van.

Garda Paul Dromey formally arrested the accused, a man in his thirties, who had been previously charged with other counts arising out of the alleged rampage, and charged him with two counts of endangerment, one of assault his partner, and a fourth count of dangerous driving.

Garda Dromey said the accused, who has been in custody since his arrest last September made no reply to the charges. Sergeant Gearóid Davis said directions had come through from the DPP for trial on indictment by judge and jury or for the accused to enter signed pleas of guilty at Cork District Court and be sent forward for sentencing at Cork Circuit Criminal Court.

Defence solicitor Frank Buttimer consulted the accused but returned to court to tell Judge Olann Kelleher the accused needed more time to consider this issue. The case was adjourned until February 9 for that purpose.

The case arises out of an alleged driving rampage on September 28, 2022.

The new charges consist of endangerment on the N40 at South Link Road where he "intentionally or recklessly engaged in conduct, intentionally drove a Ford Transit the wrong way against oncoming traffic and intentionally drove at a garda patrol car, colliding with it in an attempt to evade capture having failed to stop for gardaí when directed to do so, creating a substantial risk of death or serious injury".

The second endangerment charge relates to City Gate, Mahon, where it is alleged he intentionally drove at gardaí to evade capture.

### 1m VHI customers face higher bills after price hike

**David Kent** 

Over 1m customers are facing increased health insurance bills after VHI confirmed it is hiking its prices.

The country's biggest health insurer is to increase premiums by an average of 4.8% from March 1 in a move that could cost a family of four anything from €60 to €270 in additional payments this year.

It comes just weeks after Irish Life Health increased its policy rates, and has prompted speculation that Laya Healthcare could soon follow suit.

VHI says the increase is due to the rising demand for healthcare and the rising costs of providing healthcare to customers.

It claimed the increase was "necessary to ensure that VHI can continue to meet the costs of providing healthcare to its customers in 2023 and beyond".

VHI noted that demand for healthcare had returned to pre-pandemic levels, which it said reflected pentup demand due to reduced access to some services

during Covid-19 lockdowns. On its website, VHI claims to have over 1m customers in Ireland.

**Dermot Goode of Total-**HealthCover.ie believes that around half of their customers will not immediately be affected by the increase, as they will have recently renewed their policy.

He said: "A very quick cursory glance at the figures, this is going to cost a family of two adults and two children anything from €60 to €270 in additional premium for the year.

"The vast majority of renewals will have taken place



Family of four could face price hike of €270 a year.

between December and the end of February. A lot of consumers will miss this increase and it won't hit them

until this time next year. "To anybody who sees their premium going up, you need to pick up the phone and engage with the insurance companies. If ever there was a reason to shop around, this was it."

VHI insurance managing director Aaron Keogh said: "We understand that our customers are already dealing with the pressure of rising costs across the economy and we have made every effort to keep the price in-

crease as low as possible. "However, because of these cost pressures, the price increase is necessary."

Mr Keogh added that any surplus generated by the company is put back in to "improving services and expanding the care we deliver" He said VHI was committed to ensuring it could innovate how it delivers healthcare in the future.

This is the first price increase by VHI in two years and follows a price reduction in 2022.



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Brendan Griffin, Kerry.



Joe McHugh, Donegal.



Michael Creed, Cork North West.



Charlie Flanagan, Laois Offaly.



David Stanton, Cork East.



John Paul Phelan, Carlow-Kilkenny.



Bernard Durkan, Kildare North.



Paul Kehoe, Wexford.



Frank Feighan, Sligo-Leitrim.



Fergus O'Dowd, Louth.

### Hollowing out of Fine Gael's middle generation

Elaine Loughlin Deputy Political Editor



Ahead of any general election, there is always a certain level of natural attrition.

But with up to nine Fine Gael TDs signalling they may not run this far out from an election, Leo Varadkar should be worried.

Most concerning is the fact that many of those on the exit list are politicians who would be seen as having much more to give — both to the party and to politics.

These are in addition to the likes of Bernard Durkan, Michael Creed, Fergus O'Dowd, David Stanton, and Charlie Flanagan, who are viewed as having served a full career in politics.

Members of Fine Gael are already signalling alarm that those in the "middle generation" are thinking seriously about whether they should stand in the next election. These include John Paul Phelan and Paul Kehoe, both of whom have previously served as junior ministers, and who would have been previously considered loyal supporters of the Taoiseach and key figures in his leadership election.

"The departure of that middle generation would not be ideal, they would be the group who would provide continuity after the next generation," said one TD.

Politicians who already have a Dáil term or two behind them are invaluable to every party, not just Fine Gael. They act as mentors to newly elected TDs and senators, are known to the general public, and, if in Government, also have the experience to be considered for a senior Cabinet role.

The departure of the likes of Donegal's Joe McHugh, who last year announced he would not be running, and Kerry's Brendan Griffin, who is expected to make a formal announcement soon, hollows out Fine Gael of its middle management level.

But the stepping aside of both of these men in particular, also creates a numbers problem for the party.

Mr McHugh topped the poll Donegal North-East at the 2007 general election, with 22.6% of the first preference vote.

In 2011, Mr Griffin was selected on the Fine Gael ticket in Kerry South as a running partner for sitting Tom Sheahan. Mr Griffin topped the poll with 8,808 first preferences votes, which was over 3,000 more than his party colleague had secured.

While their votes may have fluctuated over the intervening elections, it is clear that both men have a large personal support base and are not solely reliant on the party vote.

With the polls predicting a Sinn Féin surge, these departures would leave Fine Gael vulnerable to losing representation in both Donegal and Kerry.

One senator warned that while Fine Gael are hoping to pick up seats in some constituencies, including Tipperary, Waterford, and Cork South West, these gains could be cancelled out by the level of pre-election attrition.

"If we do that, we aren't

really making gains, we are really just standing still," said one senator.

"We are in trouble in Donegal and Kerry and then we are uncertain in other constituencies of even holding the seat even if people run."

While some of the names swirling around Leinster House are currently on what one TD described as the "amber list" and not quite yet on the "red list", the redrawing of constituencies, due to be published before the summer, will undoubtedly dictate whether some stand down or not.

"Many will be waiting until July, the likes of Paul Kehoe will be looking at what happens in Wexford, Michael Creed is another man who would be waiting. There are all those dynamics at play," said one senior Fine Gael source.

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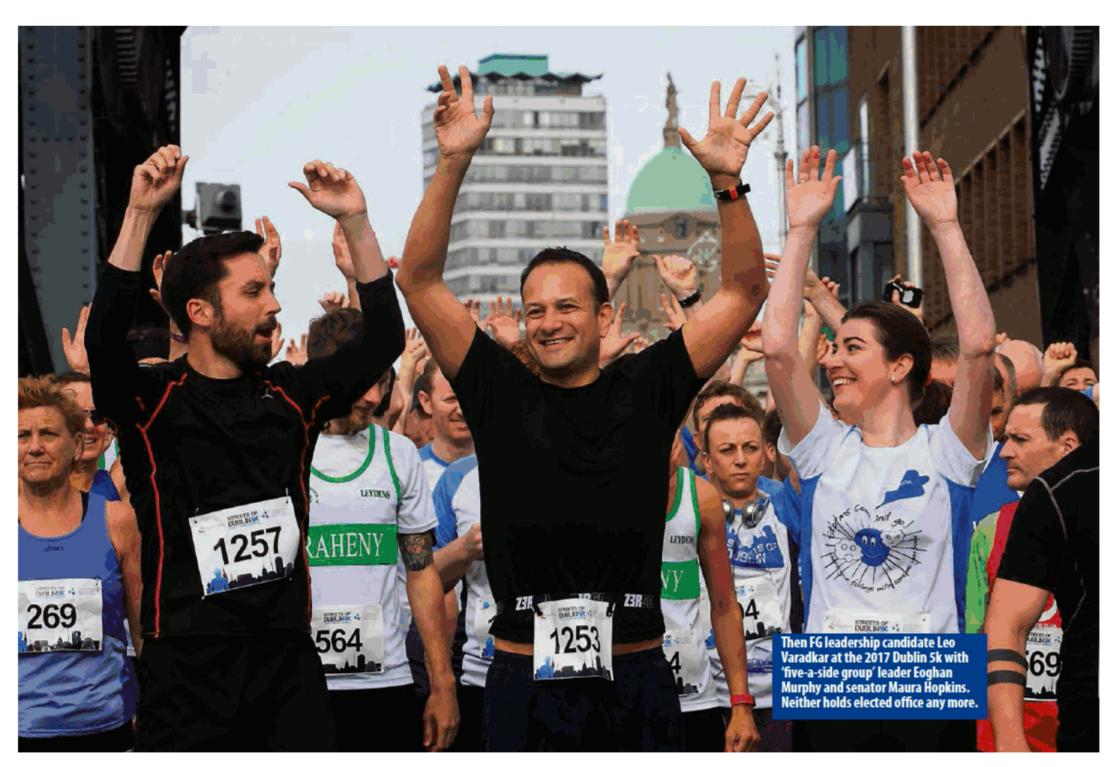
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# On the plinth

### Elaine Loughlin's take on the political week



## Leo wants the trophy but let his team walk off the pitch



N TRYING to be the great people-pleaser, Leo Varadkar has shunned his once most loyal supporters, including the infamous five-a-side group who paved his way to the Taoiseach's

Under Varadkar's leadership this team has all but disbanded, with one-time captain Eoghan Murphy exiting politics completely; others losing seats amid accusations of not being supported by the party in the 2020 elections; and the last remaining TD. Brendan Griffin, now expected to bow out ahead of the next election.

A number of those who say they put their "head on the block for him" numerous times now feel "very let down" by the Fine Gael leader.

"To me there is no loyalty in him. I would have had a lot of time for him," said one of the original five-a-side group.

It was late 2011 when a group of disgruntled Fine Gael members, unhappy with how the party and its leadership was going about things, began to agitate.

"It was more about retaining some core Fine Gael values within that coalition," said a member of the original group, who used the example of their opposition to the continuation of increments for top public servants at a time when everything else was being cut

The first meeting was attended by around 10 politicians but Brian Walsh and Martin Hayden quickly

It was this casual association of backbench TDs - Anthony Lawlor, Pat Deering, Brendan Griffin, Noel Harrington, Paul Connaughton, Sean Kyne, Sean Conlan, and Eoghan Murphy — who were all first elected in the 2011 election, that would go on to be known as the five-a-side club.

"I suppose in a way that little group of people then would have become disillusioned with Enda [Kenny], so the idea of change was something that over time became more attractive to us.

"The notion that there would be a change in leadership was something that I think was universally adopted by all of us as being something we wanted."

In stoking the Fine Gael fire, they created the environment to allow Varadkar to ascend.

By the summer of 2016, Griffin had come out on national radio to publicly articulate the frustration that many had been venting pri-

The momentum grew significantly at the Fine Gael think-in in Newbridge, Co Kildare the following September when what was described by one TD as a "swarm" of journalists descended on Griffin, Daly, and Deering while they were sitting together in the hotel. All three declared that a change of leadership was required for the good of the party and the country.

Griffin, probably knowing the impact his comments would have, didn't return to the party discussion and instead quickly went up to his room, got his bags, and high-tailed it to Dublin.

As the weeks and months progressed and it became obvious that Kenny's tenure as Taoiseach was running out of time, the five-a-side group worked behind the scenes mustering support for Varadkar but also went out on a limb to move publicly against the then

In early 2017, for example, Deering told RTE's Morning Ireland he would table a motion of no confidence in Kenny if he did not set out a timeline for his departure.

As the leadership contest officially got underway, Eoghan Murphy, who was often described as the five-a-side captain, along with John Paul Phelan and Paul Kehoe, became instrumental in sounding out councillors and TDs.

Murphy was responsible for managing the masterplan and Phelan was asked to draw up a "spouses list" for Varadkar so he knew more about those he was hoping to lure onside.

Varadkar claimed the leadership of his party, with 51 of the 73 members of the parliamentary

party backing him back in 2017. So how, after cultivating a tight group of politicians around him, did Varadkar allow his band of supporters to unravel?

'I think he is totally obsessed with what the media might think," said one Fine Gaeler no longer in Leinster House. "I would be of the opinion that you are better off

#### Did you know?

The Irish language version of the Constitution, or Bunreacht na hÉireann, takes precedence over the English text if there is seen to be a conflict between both versions. In 2015, the Government was forced to change the Irish-language version of the wording of the same-sex marriage referendum because of a possibility that a marriage between a heterosexual couple might be found

standing for something than standing for nothing, but he would try to be all things to all people."

unconstitutional.

This is echoed by others who have arrived into national politics since the elevation of Varadkar, with one politician stating that he focuses on "things that don't really matter".

Pointing to an overemphasis on obtaining gender balance and constantly promoting female party members, the politician said Mr Varadkar has let his strongest allies down in order to achieve something that is not remarked upon by the grassroots or the general public on the ground.

"Micheál [Martin] is loved across the country and he only has one woman in Cabinet," the Fine Gael source said.

While difficult to imagine now, many in the party claim that Murphy would have been seen as a future leader of the party before he was shunted into Housing by Varadkar.

"He won Leo the leadership race and then he was rewarded with absolutely fuck all and got no support," said a source who would have been very close to Murphy.

They added that while Murphy was "diligent" working 14-hour days in the Department of Housing, "it wasn't a natural fit in any shape or form".

Others have said that, not wanting to disappoint more vocal politicians or cause a row with Simon Coveney, he went for the easy option in putting Murphy into an ill-fitting portfolio, which then became a contributing factor in the Dublin Bay South TD leaving politics altogether.

Those close to Deering say the former Carlow TD felt he got little to no support during the election, with Leo Varadkar coming down to the constituency the day before

the election when it was too late. Sources say he felt extremely "hurt" when he was passed over not once but twice for the Seanad, with Michael D'Arcy initially being selected ahead of him and then Maria Byrne being chosen as his replacement when he took up a job in the private sector.

At a recent parliamentary party meeting, Sean Kyne also hit out at the party leadership for the lack of support he received in the 2020 election.

He told colleagues that no effort was made to change the constituency strategy as it was pre-sumed that he would retain his seat even though there were significant local issues.

Meanwhile, Griffin, who is expected to soon formally announce his decision not the run in the next election, has been left somewhat disillusioned after being overlooked for the chief whip position in December.

When Varadkar contacted Griffin to let him know he had lost out just 45 minutes before the Cabinet was to be publicly announced, the Kerry TD told his party leader that he had already been informed through the national newspapers that morning, something which sources say left a very bitter taste in his mouth.

While not officially members of the five-a-side group, having been elected prior to 2011, it worth noting that former junior ministers Phelan and Kehoe, who now sit on the backbenches, are among nine Fine Gael TDs already signalling that they may not contest the next election.

Another supporter, Joe McHugh, has already announced he will not be running in the next

Varadkar focuses too much on the "aerial battle" of politics but "neglects the ground war" and the "mobilisation of the troops on the ground", Phil Hogan recently claimed in an RTE interview with Sean O'Rourke.

In setting his sights on the ultimate trophy, Varadkar has let his team walk off the pitch.

#### From the archives



February 4: Fianna Fáil won its first overall majority in Dáil Éireann. The Cork Examiner reported that Frank Aiken was the principal speaker at a "victory demonstration" held by the Fianna Fáil Cork branch on Grand Parade in the city. "Four city bands attended and two torchlight processions, starting from different points in the city, converged on the Parade, and assembled a big gathering despite the inclemency of the weather."

#### The Cork Examiner







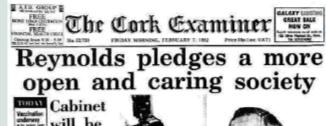




#### 1972

£9,000

February 2: The British embassy was burned in response to Bloody Sunday. "The embassy in Merrion Square, Dublin, which lay under siege for the past three days, faced its final onslaught of angry protesters yesterday afternoon, when, after about 40 petrol bombs were thrown, it was gutted by fire," a front-page report in The Cork Examiner stated.











## Ministers 'committed' to implement mental health report

Cormac O'Keeffe

Security Correspondent

The ministers of health and justice are "committed" to implementing recommendations of a task force on diverting people with mental health or addiction issues from prisons and improving their level of care.

The departments said that a steering committee across the two agencies has been set up to drive implementation of the 67 recommendations of

mental health, addiction, and the criminal justice sys-

The statement comes after the head of the task force, former Labour TD for Cork North-Central, Kathleen Lynch, said the task force shared the "same worries" about implementation of the report that have been aired by various people.

At a seminar in UCC last Thursday, Ms Lynch said that the task force wanted

the high-level task force on implementation of the report would be given to an office with the sole purpose of ensuring implementation.

The 230-page report, published last September, called for significant changes across various government departments and State bodies in the treatment of people with mental health and addiction issues who commit crimes

Ms Lynch said her concerns about implementation was not due to lack of will among the relevant ministers or the departments but due to how the matter was going to get on the agenda in departments that were con-

stantly responding to crises. In response, the Department of Health said both Health Minister Stephen Donnelly and the minister of state for mental health, Mary Butler, were committed to working with the Minister for Justice to implement the recommendations.

It said a "joint steering

committee" between the departments had been set up, jointly chaired by assistant commissioner from the two departments - reporting directly to the ministers.

It said monitoring was done at "national, cross-departmental level to provide drive and momentum to implementation".

It said representatives of key agencies, such as gardaí and the Irish Prison Service, can be asked to attend and provide updates.

"The first meeting of the steering group was held in December last year and another is planned in the coming weeks," it said.

It said many of the recommendations dovetail with those from other Government strategies, such as Sláintecare, Connecting for Life, and Sharing the Vision.

The Department of Justice said the report included an implementation plan, with time frames of 18 months, three years and five years.

Ms Lynch said the task force had "the same worries about implementation' other people had, though she believed the departments

were committed to it. "But there's a crisis in the Department of Health every day," she said. "I've been there, I know. There's a crisis in the Department of Justice every week, whether it's staff shortages, whether it's an incident. So where is the space then for this? Who is

going to drive this on?"

**Budgetary** issues were also raised at the seminar.

The Department of Health said: "It should be noted that delivery systems and budgetary process can vary between countries when it comes to health and personal social care services. The focus on mental health improvements in Ireland through a variety of funding mechanisms and service structures renders an exact comparison to other countries difficult."

### 'Joined-up' thinking needed for Irish waters

Pádraig Hoare

**Environment Correspondent** 

It is essential to co-operate with the likes of Britain if Ireland is to protect biodiversity in Irish waters because "marine life does not respect international boundaries".

That is according to one of Ireland's leading experts on the proposed Marine Protected Areas Bill, which aims to cement the country's ambition to protect 30% of its maritime area by 2030.

The EU's Marine Strategy Framework Directive legally compels member states to establish marine protected areas (MPAs), stipulating that spatial protection measures be put in place to conserve biodiversity.

Campaigners have long called for MPAs to be expanded, with environmental groups such as Fair Seas identifying 16 areas in Irish waters that should be designated to protect the likes of sharks, rays, and puffins.

University College Dublin professor Tasman Crowe told TDs and senators at an Oireachtas committee hearing that the newly proposed bill provided a "huge opportunity" to enhance biodiver-

sity protection. Prof Crowe said: "I think it is important for everyone to appreciate that designating an MPA does not entail putting a fence up around the area and preventing anything from happening in it... For example, if protecting a seagrass bed, leisure boats would perhaps be able to pass over it, but not to an-

Prof Crowe added that stakeholder consultation and participation in the process of identifying and managing MPAs was perhaps the most important element.

"There is also explicit mention of transboundary considerations. Marine life does not respect international boundaries and it is essential that there is some joined-up thinking with our neighbours," he added.

"All in all, I think legislation based on this bill would represent a very significant step change in our relationship with our maritime environment and present a huge opportunity to better manage our interactions with it, both for the health and sustainability of the ecosystems themselves, but also for the wellbeing and prosperity of current and future generations.



Clochar Beach on Slea Head looking out towards An Fear Marbh off the Dingle Peninsula. An area from Kerry to Clare has been designated an important conservation area.



A minke whale feeding on schooling prey, with Skellig Beag in the background.



Skellig Michael is the summer home to thousands of Atlantic Puffins, which spend their time on the island, breeding and fattening their chicks on sand-eel and sprat.

# Greater Skellig Coast identified as 'hope spot' for endangered species

Padraig Hoare **Environment Correspondent** 

An area measuring 7,000 sq km off the Munster coast has been identified by one of the world's greatest oceanographers as a "hope spot" for critically endangered animals, whales, and fish.

National Geographic's explorer in residence Sylvia Earle added the Greater Skellig Coast, which stretches from Kenmare Bay in Co Kerry to Loop Head in Co Clare, to the Mission Blue conservation organisation's hope spot list, which includes the Great Barrier Reef, the Galapogos Islands, and parts of Ant-

Dr Earle was the first ever female chief scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the US, as well as being a member of the worldwide Ocean Elders conservation group.

The hope spot off the Irish coast is now one of 148 across the world to be designated with the status because of its rich biodiversity, including

sharks, and seabird colonies. Irish MEP and former Greenpeace

ictivist Grace O'Sullivan said the hope spot designation from Time magazine's first 'Hero for the Planet' in 1998 is "further proof that 2023 is going to be the year of the oceans for

The Tramore-based MEP added: "We are putting in place new legislation at home to expand our Marine Protected Areas [MPA] from around 2% to 30% of Irish seas by 2030 and setting up Mara, a new government agency for maritime planning.

"At the same time, the EU is planning to increase protections of those areas including ending the practice of intense bottom-trawling in vulnerable marine ecosystems and increasing conservation efforts under the first ever EU Nature Resto-

ration Law.' A report from a broad coalition of Irish environmental groups last summer found that a mere 2.1% of the Irish coast were MPAs, compared to 10% on average in the EU, and far below the European Commission's ambition of 30% for each nation by

The EU's Biodiversity Strategy aims for 30% of the bloc's marine

waters deemed protected by zoso, after setting a 10% for 2018 - showing just how far Ireland must go to reach the target.

Fair Seas, which includes groups such as the Irish Wildlife Trust, Birdwatch Ireland, Coastwatch, and Friends of the Irish Environment, identified areas around the coast based on the geographic distributions of 15 species of whales and dolphins; 38 species of seabirds, and 16

species of sharks, skates, and rays. Its report identified 16 areas of interest such as Kenmare to Loop Head, the Celtic Sea off the Cork coast as far as the English southwest, and Galway Bay and Islands.

Fair Seas campaign manager Aoife O'Mahony said the endorsement by Dr Earle was very significant.

"It is incredible to see a small part of Ireland's seas being recognised as critically important to global ocean health by Mission Blue, and joining the likes of the Galapágos Islands and other world-famous marine locations," she said.

"The waters off the coast of Kerry and Clare are rich with fascinating creatures and marine life but there



Sylvia Earle on a Mission Blue exploration

has been an alarming decline in the numbers of iconic species like angel sharks in recent years.

## Griffin angered at missing out as FG chief whip

Varadkar's decision added to Kerry TD's reasons for quitting National politics 'challenging' for those based far from Dublin

> Mr Griffin said he had sought advice from many

> people before making his

decision, including Donegal

TD Joe McHugh, who an-

nounced his intention to step

down from politics last year.

national politics was very

challenging for those based

far from the centre of power

In a statement, the Taoi-

seach said he "understands

entirely" that the backbench

TD wants to spend more time

with his family and said he

has been "a very effective ad-

lessly for the people of

Kerry," said Mr Varadkar.

"His legacy includes the two

greenways in North Kerry;

progress on the south Kerry

greenway, which is now in

the early stages of construc-

tion; improvements on the

new Cork to Kerry road, in-

cluding the Macroom by

pass; financial support for

Kerry Airport and for sports

clubs throughout the county.

has shown unstinting ser-

vice for the people of Kerry

as their public represen-

said he would not be inter-

ested in standing in the gen-

eral election and that he was

focused on his work in Eu-

Now, speculation has

moved to who will replace

Fine Gael MEP Seán Kelly

"And above all, Brendan

vocate for rural Ireland".

in Dublin.

Mr Griffin said that

#### **Elaine Loughlin** and Anne Lucey

Fine Gael TD Brendan Griffin has revealed that Leo Varadkar's decision not to appoint him as chief whip contributed to his decision not to run in the next general

In a letter to party members and councillors, the Kerry backbencher said that after much consultation with his family he had decided to not be seek a nomination to stand in the next general election.

"The reasons for this is a straigntiorward one. i nave two young sons and I want to be around them more for the remaining years of their childhood," he total local party members.

"It is also a job that takes you away from home and loved ones for long periods of time on a regular basis.

"And when you are at home, your mind is often preoccupied with any number of issues and challenges.

There had been speculation about Mr Griffin's intentions after he was overlooked for the position of chief whip in December's Cabinet reshuffle.

Speaking on RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, Mr Griffin, who was first elected in 2011, admitted that the Taoiseach's decision not to give him the Chief Whip had angered him.

"I was disappointed, and a bit angry. But I know the Taoiseach only had a few spots ... and like Jack O'Connor, he couldn't put every player on the field."

He said that the Taoiseach was disappointed when he informed him of the decision, and that he believes most of the party is happy with his leadership.

"He was disappointed," he said. "He knew I wasn't happy with political life for a while, but he thought I'd do another term. We're still

very friendly." It was first revealed by the Irish Examiner on Friday that Mr Griffin was one of nine Fine Gael TDs who are not expected to run in the next election, in what will be a significant blow to Mr Var-

Mr Griffin as the Fine Gael candidate, with sitting councillors Aoife Thornton in Listowel, Patrick Connor-Scarteen in Kenmare, and Bobby O'Connell in Castleisland seen as contenders.

Aoife Thornton is in the running to replace Brendan Griffin.

## German Shepherds to be put down after 'vicious' attack

**Tom Tuite** 

A judge has ordered that a Dublin man's two German Shepherds be destroyed after a court heard the unmuzzled and unleashed dogs "viciously" attacked a neigh-

Fingal County Council brought a case under the Control of Dogs Act against Khalid Hamdy of Cedar

View, Ridgewood Swords. He told Dublin District

Court he did not believe his pets were dangerous. He also said they helped him cope with post-traumatic stress disorder he had suffered since being incarcerated in 2019 in Egypt with 150 men in a cell where he witnessed torture and four people die.

However, neighbour Michael James O'Rourke told the court that, on November 13, he had just left his house to bring his two smaller dogs on a walk when Hamdy's

dogs attacked them.

He told solicitor Michael Quinlan, for the council, that they were unmuzzled and unleashed.

Another couple told the court they witnessed it and claimed Hamdy's dogs had repeatedly gone into their garden after a storm knocked down fencing previously. Hamdy denied claims that

there had been problems with his dogs in the past. However, the dog warden

seized them on the day of the incident and had them in a pound since then.

Describing it as a "very difficult case", Judge Anthony Halpin said he would deal with the case clinically, bearing little attention to the interpersonal issue between Mr Hamdy and his neighbour Mr O'Rourke because it did not affect the actual matter before the court.

The single point was that on November 13, the two German Shepherds caused damage in an attack on a person who had been with his smaller dogs.

He accepted that the dogs were a source of comfort for Hamdy but they were a restricted breed and not under effective control or muzzled at the time.

Hamdy's barrister asked the court to note his evidence that he would put more measures in place to prevent the dogs from getting out.

However, Judge Halpin said that, taking all matters into account, he had to make an order of destruction for both dogs and payment of €4,000 in costs.

He added that Hamdy would not have been in court had they been under effective control.

The judge placed a stay on the destruction order for two weeks and adjourned the case until February 14 in case an appeal is lodged.

# Irish Examiner

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- Julie Jay: I find the sun terrifying
- Colman Noctor: Think before you post
- Aoife Hearne: Answers your questions



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Is Cork's underage success a sign of things to come?

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Tuesday, June 6, 2023 www.irishexaminer.com No. 62,805 €2.40 (£1.70 in N. Ireland)

## Patient rang 999 before dying alone in hospital

Niamh Griffin Health Correspondent

An elderly woman who died alone in a Cork hospital had made a 999 call to gardaí from her ward, asking them

not to "forget her". Alice Donovan, 78, was in the Mercy University Hospital from December 27, 2020, until her death from covid-19 in the early hours of January 30, 2021.

Her daughter Allison McCarthy has been fighting since then to find out what happened during her mother's time in the hospital and what prompted her to phone gardaí.

'They've said now my mother was alone when she died. I live four minutes away," Allison said.

Her mum Alice was admitted by ambulance, and over the following days and weeks, it emerged she was facing serious health problems in addition to her lung condition, COPD.

Visiting was not allowed due to covid-19 restrictions at the time, but Allison was with her mother by phone and regularly spoke with nurses on the wards.

On January 22, she was told her mother had caught

Up to that point, only her brother had been allowed in to visit for a few minutes. On January 28, she convinced nurses to allow her in for about an hour, and her sister on the evening of January 29.



Alice Donovan died at the Mercy hospital in January 2021.

"My sister was there until 10.30pm, the nurse told her. 'She's going nowhere, she's too strong' and she left," Alli-

"I rang at 12.30am and couldn't get through. I rang at 1.30am and couldn't get through, then at 2.15am I rang again."

She was told the nurse in charge of Alice was on break and would call.

'The phone rang at 3.02am and the nurse said: 'Allison, we are just ringing to say your mum passed so peace-

Allison raised the family's frustrations with Mercy University Hospital management, and then with the ombudsman Ger Deering.

The ombudsman's report, issued on May 29, said: "The hospital acknowledges that your mother was alone when she passed away. It says that, unfortunately, this can

While it tries as much as possible to ensure that family or a member of staff are with patients at the end of life, it can sometimes happen that patients pass away in their sleep.

"Hospital practice is that each patient is checked every 15 minutes. The hospital apologises to you for any upset that this may have caused you or your family."

Until this, Allison believed nurses were with her mother.

"I wanted the truth," she

The report also said the Mercy Hospital apologised for the lack of follow-up around a 999 call Alice made.

Some weeks after her mother died, Allison confirmed this call with gardaí who played the recording for her and her sister.

"You could hear all the machines beeping in the background," Allison said.

The last thing she said to him was: 'I'm 78 years of age boy, don't forget about me.'

A spokesman for the Mercy University Hospital said they cannot comment on individual cases.



Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Simon Coveney, in Cork.

#### 'I'm as motivated as I've ever been'

— On speculation that he might not run in the next general election

'I don't believe that we should move to a work permit system that simply allows anybody who wants to come to Ireland to come to work here'

— On work visas

## Coveney: I'm not going anywhere

#### Elaine Loughlin Political Editor

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Simon Coveney has put to bed rumours that he will not run or will change constituencies at the next general election.

The Fine Gael minister has said he is loyal to those he has served in Cork South Central for the past 25 years and says he will not be part of an exodus from the party following a number of highprofile departures.

Mr Coveney has denied that disillusionment or fatigue has played a part in the announcements of five sitting TDs, including David Stanton in Cork East, not to

run at the next election. "I've spoken to all of the people individually and I think they all have both understandable and real reasons for leaving.

"It's not disillusionment with politics or anything like that. It's normally family and personal circumstances that I think often isn't fully understood, and that's because they're personal decisions," he said.

Mr Coveney, who was elected to Cork South Central following the death of his father Hugh Coveney in 1998, sparked speculation that he might run in Cork East after recently purchasing the €900,000 Ballynoe House in Cobh, outside his Cork South Central constituency.

"I think it's important to put that into context. I mean, I'm looking at my constituency. I live a couple of hundred yards from Cork South Central", he said when asked if he might not stand as a candidate in his current constituency, which is also represented by Tánaiste Micheál Martin,

Finance Minister Michael

McGrath, and Sinn Féin TD Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire.

"I didn't move house just to move constituency", he said, and that the house, set on around six acres, will provide his family with more

In a wide-ranging interview with the Irish Examiner, Mr Coveney said he has never been more committed to politics but warned that Irish people perhaps don't appreciate the "extraordinary economic success" that the country has gained.

He stands by his insistence on a mandatory three-day wait period for women who have been cleared to access

abortion services here. An independent review of the State's abortion legislation has now recommended the removal of the three-day waiting period between the certification of a termination of pregnancy

and the procedure taking

#### ■ Minister will not join mini-exodus from Fine Gael ■ Maintains belief in three-day wait on abortion

place, "I thought then, and I think now, that a reflection period on a decision as significant as a termination of pregnancy was an important part of the piece of legislation," Mr Coveney

"I'd be slow to move away from the balance that was there in that referendum proposition.'

Turning to his brief as enterprise, trade, and employment minister, he ruled out any work visa changes for those coming here from Georgia.

Around 20% of all those seeking asylum in Ireland last year came from Georgia, the largest figure for any country.

The EU Asylum Agency has said the invasion of Ukraine has been a key factor behind the increase in Georgian nationals applying for international protection.

Mr Coveney said: "You can't have an open-door migration policy, particularly when you have housing pressures like we have, and when you have population

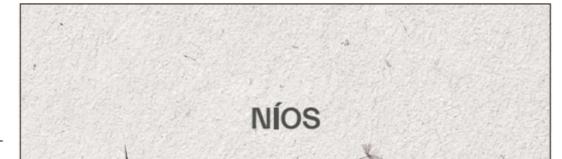
growth at the pace that we have. We need to be sensible

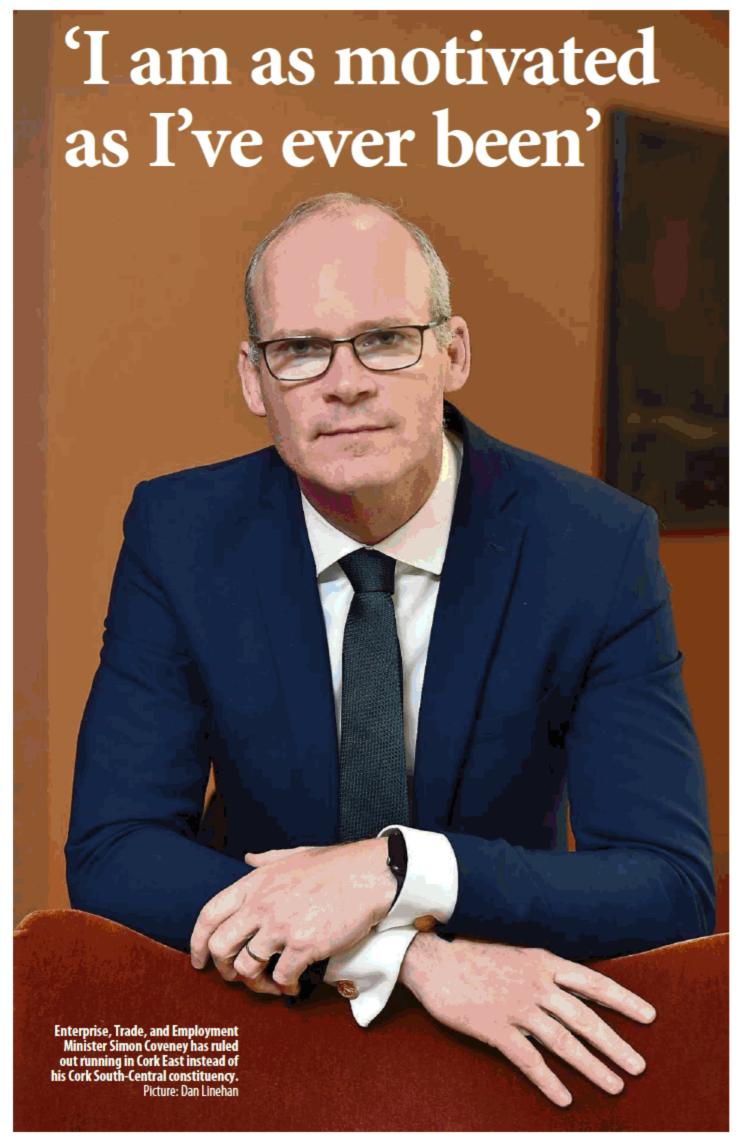
about how we manage that. "I don't envisage that we're going to do something special for Georgia.

"We shouldn't necessarily crossover people who are coming here seeking international protection with

work permits. "They are two separate systems and we need to keep the separate for good reason."

Read Elaine Loughlin's full interview with Simon Coveney on Page 4





IMON COVENEY has spent exactly half of his 50 years in politics, and he is not going anywhere.

The Fine Gael TD may have moved to a home outside his own constituency boundary for "family reasons" but he is "loyal" to those he serves in Cork South-Central.

"I think it's important to put that into context [moving house]. I mean, I'm looking at my constituency. I live a couple of hundred yards from Cork South-Central," he says.

Mr Coveney claims he has never been more committed to politics but warns that Irish people perhaps don't realise how good they have it and his party will have to work hard to reinforce that

He has also firmly ruled out a coalition with Sinn Féin, saying Mary Lou McDonald's party is "not compatible" with Fine Gael.

"I don't believe that a Fine Gael-Sinn Féin government would last."

The father of three sparked political rumours that he might run in Cork East after recently purchasing Ballynoe House in Cobh.

The departure of longserving TD David Stanton only added fuel to the gossip flames, as the upcoming vacancy now provides Coveney with an easy transition to Cork East.

However, he strongly rules this out and instead points to a number of very promising councillors in the area who he hopes will "make the choice to step up and run".

He insists the move across constituency boundaries to the five-bed home set on around six acres was solely to provide more room for his

family.
"I didn't move house just to move constituency.

"The reason why I moved was for family reasons for my children mainly, but I'm still very connected to Cork South-Central, my office is on the main street in Carrigaline. I'm in and out of Cork South-Central when I'm in Cork all the time and we're as busy as we've ever been in the office.

"I'm as motivated as I've ever been," Mr Coveney says when asked about his intentions for the next general

A move to Europe, which has also been speculated after his tenure in the Department of Foreign Affairs, is also off the agenda, at least for now.

That's certainly not the plan. Who knows what the future holds? I mean, I'd be a fool to just sort-of rule things



Simon Coveney is loyal to Cork South-Central, and is working to promote the message that Ireland is in a good place, he tells Political Editor **Elaine** 

### Loughlin

out categorically, but I don't see myself as a European commissioner in the foreseeable future.

Mr Coveney, while committed to his party, has undoubtedly seen his standing within Fine Gael diminish since losing out to Leo Varadkar in the 2017 leadership race. If he were to make another try for the top slot - he gives the standard answer that there is currently no vacancy — he would likely have younger contenders of Simon Harris, Helen McEntee, and possibly Peter Burke or Jennifer Carroll MacNeill to take on.

His performance in this Government could be described as patchy, having inflicted significant damage on both his own personal reputation and that of Fine Gael with the Zapponegate controversy.

Instead of quashing the matter, he fanned the flames in the summer of 2021 when he suggested that the botched appointment of Katherine Zappone as UN special envoy was "a relatively minor issue" pointing out in a radio interview that he had just come back from Africa where he had been working on human rights issues linked to our role in the UN Security Council.

Coveney, however, did well in Foreign Affairs and gained respect for his quiet but effective approach

around the Brexit protocol issue. But in his current role, he was seen to have judged things wrongly again when in February he claimed Ireland was over the worst of the tech sector layoffs.

Coveney was viewed as one of the more conservative voices around the Cabinet table when a repeal of the Eighth Amendment was being discussed ahead of what would eventually result in a historic referendum result. So much so that some within the previous Government dubbed the insertion of the three-day wait period for abortion services as "the Coveney clause".

This reflection period has again come up for discussion following the publication of an independent review of abortion care in this country.

Last week, the report's author Marie O'Shea told an Oireachtas Committee that there is no legal or medical reason to retain the mandatory wait time and has suggested that it instead be made optional.

When it is put to him that the three-day wait period hasn't worked well, he quickly says: "I don't think anyone has said that it has not worked well.

"I mean, not everybody has been interviewed in relation to people who've had abortions in Ireland in recent years.'

He still believes the threeday clause was still the right thing to do.

"I advocated for a yes vote in the referendum on the basis of clarity around the legislation that we were going to pass, and I think that was the right decision now and I think it was the right decision then.

"I thought then, and I think now, that a reflection period on a decision as sig-nificant as a termination of pregnancy was an important part of a piece of legislation," he says before adding that he, of course, will have an open mind to listen to counter-arguments.

"But I believe that that was the right thing to do then, and I still think it has an important role to play today.'

As Minister for Enterprise, Trade, and Employment, he sees his job as ensuring we continue to have a strong economy where young Irish people have career options when they leave school or college and don't have to emigrate.

But with unemployment figures now at a record low, ensuring the workforce is there to meet demand from employers is a challenge he

He says the first priority is to try to fill roles with Irish

**66A** move to Europe, which has also been speculated, is also off the agenda, at least for now

people who may be looking for work and he will not be moving to open up the visa system to those arriving here from Georgia.

"I don't believe that we should move to a work permit system that simply allows anybody who wants to come to Ireland to come to work here."

Instead, a "balancing of needs" is required, particularly given the pressures we already have on housing and other services in this country.

He adds: "I don't envisage that we're going to do something special for Georgia, I don't think we should necessarily crossover people who are coming here seeking international protection with work permits. They are two separate systems and we need to keep them separate for good reason.

"You can't have an opendoor migration policy, particularly when you have housing pressures like we have, and when you have population growth at the pace that we have. So we need to be sensible about how we manage that."

While housing and healthcare are still serious issues that need to be addressed, he suggests that Irish people sometimes don't recognise how good of a place the country is now in.

"The way in which Ireland is seen from abroad is often not reflected in the way in which many people in Ireland see ourselves. I think one of the challenges for the Government is to turn what is an extraordinary economic success story into contentment across Irish society. Ireland is actually doing quite well.

"I think that will be a big focus for Fine Gael going into the next general election cycle."

It's an election that Coveney is very much focused on, despite rumours to the contrary.
"I have no difficulty

getting up in the morning to go to work. I'm very driven. I always have been in politics. and I still am," he insists.