

News

First day of new Seanad

On Wednesday May 25 2011 the newly elected members of Seanad Éireann met for what could be the first meeting of the last ever Seanad should the plans within the Programme for Government actualise.

Proceedings began at 2:30pm and as longest standing member, David Norris temporarily took the chair and mistakenly welcomed the 34th Seanad. He quickly corrected himself saying "I hope there will be a 34th Seanad".

This remark came after an announcement made earlier in the day by Taoiseach Enda Kenny that a referendum would be held next year on the abolition of the Seanad. These opening words set the tone for the rest of the day with various members expressing their concern over the future of the upper house.

Indeed words like "survive", "extinction" "embattled" and "courage" featured prominently in the opening speech by Senator Norris. He even referred to ancient Rome where they "triumphed" because "the Senate and the people, were united, but we have allowed this great institution to become separated and remote from the people we are paid to serve."

However, there was business to be dealt with and after congratulating Senator Norris on his "presidential" type speech, leader of the house, Maurice Cummins, of Fine Gael nominated Paddy Burke for position of Cathaoirleach. This motion was seconded by Independent TD Ivana Bacik and Darragh O'Brien announced Fianna Fáil's support.

The newly elected Cathaoirleach, Paddy Burke of Fine Gael thanked the Senators and addressed the future of the Seanad stating that whatever happened "it is incumbent on us as Senators in the 24th Seanad to demonstrate how we can contribute in a meaningful way to the democratic life of the State".

This inspired many of the 60 senators and Fine Gael's Fidelma Healy Eames echoed these sentiments saying that it may be the final sitting "but it can be the best."

The next meeting of the Seanad will commence on Wednesday June 1.

Oireachtas Update

Dáil

Tuesday May 31

2.30pm

Questions (Taoiseach)

3.15pm

Questions (Minister for Health and Children)

4.15pm

Leaders Questions

4.36pm

Order of Business

Criminal Justice Bill 2011 Second Stage (resumed) (Department of Justice and Equality)

7.00pm

Private Members' Business: Motion re Government and Oireachtas Reform (Technical Group)

8.30pm

Matters on the Adjournment (see above for link)

Wednesday June 1

10.30am

Leaders Questions

10.51am

Order of Business

11.21am

Questions (Taoiseach)

Motion re Smithwick Tribunal (to conclude within 45 minutes) (Department of Justice and Equality)

Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Bill 2011 - Order for Second Stage and Second Stage (Department of Finance)

1.30pm

SOS

2.30pm

Questions (Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport)

3.45pm

Morning Business resumed

7.00pm

Private Members' Business: Motion re Government and Oireachtas Reform (resumed) (Technical Group)

8.30pm

Matters on the Adjournment

Thursday June 2

10.30am

Order of Business

Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Bill 2011 - Second Stage (resumed) (Department of Finance)

Statements re Dáil Reform

3.30pm

Questions (Minister for Foreign Affairs)

4.45pm

Matters on the Adjournment

Seanad

Wednesday June 1

2.30pm

Order of Business

4.00pm

Election of Leas-Chathaoirleach

Motions to restore the following Bills to the Order Paper:- (without debate)

Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Bill 2011 (Seanad) Order for Second Stage

Ombudsman (Amendment) Bill 2008 – Second Stage.

Coroners Bill 2007 (Seanad) – Committee Stage

Jurisdiction of Courts and Enforcement of Judgements (Amendment) Bill 2011 (Seanad) – Order for Second Stage.

Privacy Bill 2006 (Seanad) – Order for Second Stage.

4.15pm

Motion re Smithwick Tribunal of Inquiry (45 mins)

5.00pm

Non-Government Business Motion re Tourism in the name of the Leader of the House (Fine Gael Senators)

7.00pm

Matters on the Adjournment

Thursday June 2

10.30 am

Order of Business

Motion regarding Establishment of Committee of Selection.(without debate)

Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Bill 2011 (Seanad) - Order for Second Stage and Second Stage

7.00pm

Matters on the Adjournment

Appointments

New CEO for Crafts Council of Ireland

The Crafts Council of Ireland, which is under the remit of the Department of activities are Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation, has announced the appointment of Karen Hennessy as its new chief executive.

The Crafts Council of Ireland is the main champion of the craft industry in Ireland, fostering its growth and commercial strength, communicating its unique identity and stimulating quality design, innovation and competitiveness.

Departments of State

Department of Education and Skills

Initiative to springboard people into employment

A new education initiative entitled 'Springboard' was launched on May 25 by the Department of Education and Skills. Taking those who have been made redundant or lost their jobs, the scheme will give them training and skills to ultimately place them in employment again.

Springboard, which is managed by the Higher Education Authority, will operate in the same way as the CAO through one single website, bluebrick.ie. Earlier in the month, the department announced further funding of €2.8m to the initiative which has been designed to help those with a previous history of employment in construction, manufacturing or other sectors of the economy where employment levels are unlikely to recover to pre-recession levels.

A range of part time courses are available and individuals can retain their social protection supports. In total, 34 institutions in both the public and private sector, will offer programmes ranging from Certificates in Digital Marketing and in Supply Chain Management to Masters in Energy Management.

Department of Transport

Government launches campaign to encourage people to holiday at home

The government have launched a new scheme to encourage people to holiday in Ireland instead of travelling abroad this summer.

The launch, which comes on the back of the recent visits from the Queen and President Obama, is part of a whole package of measures aimed at rebuilding the tourism industry. The domestic tourism market is currently worth €1.3bn and Irish tourists account for two thirds of all hotel bed nights in this country.

The €1m campaign offers people 50 percent discounts on weekend rail tickets, a new Discover Ireland smartphone app and complete transformation of the Fáilte Ireland website.

Recent research by the department shows a 33 percent increase in Irish people planning to take their main family holiday in Ireland this year.

Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources

Ireland's first ever digital TV service is launched

Saorview, Ireland's first ever digital service was launched May 26 by the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Pat Rabbitte TD.

The free service will be available to the whole of Ireland and marks the change from analogue to digital television. By the end of 2012 the analogue signal will be switched off, meaning that people still using an aerial will not be able to access channels such as RTÉ and TV3.

Research carried out by the department showed that 66 per cent of households weren't aware of the switch, and nearly a quarter of a million people still use an aerial. Officials hope the launch, which took place in RTÉ's headquarters, will bring attention to the new strategy and encourage people to change over.

The new service will feature nine channels; RTÉ One, RTÉ Two HD, TV3, TG4, RTÉ News Now, 3e, RTÉjr, RTÉ One + 1 and RTÉ Digital Aertel. It is estimated that the changeover will cost €70m and forms part of the EU policy objective of achieving ASO (Analogue Switch-Off) by the end of 2012.

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Minister Brendan Howlin discusses tough economic issues

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Brendan Howlin TD addressed some key issues regarding the economic climate at a conference last week.

Unemployment numbers, economic growth rates and forecasts played a big part in the Minister's speech which he delivered on the same day that the OECD published its latest report.

The report is an assessment of Ireland's economic prospects for the upcoming year and Minister Howlin said that while the OECD outlook broadly reflects that of the Department of Finance, it is "out of line" in some respects.

While the international economic organisation expects Irish GDP to come in at zero per cent for 2011, the Government is more optimistic, saying it will grow by 0.8 per cent.

The Minister highlighted that GDP is now around 15 per cent lower than it was at its peak in mid-2007. He also said that the general government balance is now forecast to be 10 per cent of GDP this year and they expect to borrow €18bn in 2011 and €17bn in 2012 to pay for goods and services.

The unemployment rate has increased from an average of just 4.5 per cent in 2006 to 14.7 per cent in the final quarter of 2010. There are now 440,000 individuals signing on the Live Register every week and 140,000 have been signing on for over a year. Mentioning the new Job Initiative, Minister Howlin said that 21,000 training and work placement places will be available.

In his speech, Minister Howlin also said that 1,000 companies have chosen Ireland as the hub of their European networks including Facebook, eBay and Google and highlighted that a large number of multinational firms recently made announcements on new investment in Ireland.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government

Minister publishes Draft National Action Plan on Green Public Procurement for Public Consultation

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Mr Phil Hogan TD has published a draft issue of the National Action Plan on Green Public Procurement for public consultation which is available now at environ.ie.

The action plan intends to highlight existing best-practice procurement as an example to procurers of similar products and services across the public sector and outlines what further improvements could be made that would boost the percentage of GPP in Ireland to the most ambitious level possible.

The plan also outlines seven priority product groups for which the public sector should seek to “green” their tendering processes on a national basis. The groups are construction, energy, food and catering services, transport, cleaning products and services, paper, uniforms and other textiles.

The Minister stated that the Action Plan will apply to all personnel involved in procurement across the Public Sector. It will also be of major interest to their partners in the business community, as well as to other stakeholders in the academic community, NGOs, and other parts of civil society.

“Stakeholder buy-in will be critical” the Minister added and that “I look forward to finalising the process and publishing Ireland’s first GPP Action Plan later this year”.