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To seanadreformwg@taoiseach.gov.ie

cc

Subject Submission to the Seanad Reform Working Party

To Dr. Maurice Manning and the other members of the Seanad Reform Working Party, The Seanad, as it is currently constituted, has become in many respects a copy of Dail Eireann. The party whip for Senators ensures that the government of the day effectively controls the Seanad and in my opinion blunts the Seanad's ability to scrutinise legislation. In addition, the highly restrictive and elitist electorate for the Seanad ensures that instead of reflecting the original vocational ideals for the Seanad, it has become in many respects either a nursery for aspiring TDs, or a retirement home for failed TDs.

The Seanad cannot kill government bills, it has even more restrictive powers regarding Money Bills. This should mean that the Government of the day should reform the Seanad to allow it to be truly elected by the Irish people, and to place more emphasis on the vocational and cultural aspects of the Seanad.

My preference would be for Senators to come entirely from a non-political background and to be directly elected by PR-STV, as in the case of Dail, European and local elections. I want to remove the adversarial nature of the Seanad, and reform it to become a genuine forum that reflects the diversity of modern Irish society. In addition I would advocate a 50:50 gender ratio in the reformed chamber.

For the vocational panels, only the relevant nominating bodies should nominate candidates for their relevant panel. These candidates should not be professional politicians but should instead have a proven record in that particular vocation. For example, the Agricultural panel should be elected from candidates who have a proven connection with agriculture, the Cultural and Educational panel should also be elected from candidates who are specifically from either a cultural or educational background. The vocational panels would be directly elected by the current Dail Eireann electorate, on the basis that an elector would vote for one chosen panel only.

If a Dail Eireann elector has also the right to vote for the reformed University panel, they should vote either for their chosen vocational panel, or for a university panel, but not both.

The reformed University panel would be open as I understand it, to graduates of all Irish Third Level institutions. I would advocate a unified panel of six senators for this.

Currently the Taoiseach of the day, has the right to nominate 11 Senators. To give representation in the Seanad to Irish citizens resident in Northern Ireland and to Irish citizens abroad, I would advocate that the Taoiseach nominates 3 senators from Northern Ireland and 3 senators to represent the Irish Diaspora.

While the Taoiseach would formally nominate these candidates so that this is within the current constitutional framework, in practice these senators would be elected directly. Citizens resident in Northern Ireland would register to vote for their senators, and Irish citizens abroad, would register by post with their local Irish embassy. The overseas vote would be open to all Irish passport holders resident abroad. It would be the responsibility of the individual citizen to actively register on the overseas register, and it would be their responsibility to check that they remain on the register.

If an Irish citizen either abroad or living in Northern Ireland, is entitled also to vote for the University panel, those citizens must decide which panel they want to cast their vote in. No one should vote for more than one panel.

The Taoiseach would still have the ability to nominate 5 senators of his or her choosing to make up the total number of 11 senators nominated by the Taoiseach.

All too often we in the Diaspora hear the complaint, "No representation without taxation". This uniquely Irish reversal of the classic American freedom slogan is in fact entirely incorrect. Many Irish electors are already outside the State's tax system and if the right to vote was dependent on payment for that right, we would not be living in a democracy! This slogan is really a red herring used by those who want to maintain the status quo. Ireland is in fact one of the few modern democracies that denies its citizens abroad the basic right of representation in parliament. My hope is that this reform process finally gives us Irish abroad the right to vote and to be heard in our national parliament.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Logue

