



Oliver Moran
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To seanadreformwg@taoiseach.gov.ie
cc
Subject Submission to the working group
on Seanad reform

Ms Timmins,

Please accept what follows as my submission to the working group on Seanad reform. You should have received last night a submission from the reform-orientated group, Second Republic. I am a member of that group and I was one of the authors of that submission. This submission, however, is my own personal submission.

In my view, the most essential problem with the proper functioning of the Seanad is the manner of nomination and election of the 43 vocational panel senators.

If the Seanad is to be an effect second house, it needs to be independent of the Dáil. If the vocational panel senators are to effectively represent the knowledge and experience of vocational areas then they need to be nominated and elected by people with a primary and genuine interest in those areas.

Currently only half of vocational senators are nominated by vocational bodies. The other half are nominated by political parties (i.e. organisations that do not have knowledge or experience in those vocational area).

And, in virtually all cases, the election of vocational senators is controlled by political parties through bloc voting. In the most despicable of examples, which is unfortunately commonplace, the marking of ballot papers for the election of vocational senators is even supervised by party officials to ensure bloc voting that represents the interests of political parties.

The interests of the party may be to provide a "rising star" with a platform to build a future Dáil election campaign, for example. Or it may be to make sure that a preferred candidate who failed to be elected to the Dáil is elected afterwards to the Seanad. In nearly all cases, it will be to ensure that the party's actions in the Dáil (whether in Government or in Opposition) are carried forward to the Seanad.

This utterly destroys whatever benefit a system of vocational panel senators could bring. Through this system of nomination-and-election, in nearly all cases, those elected represent party-political interests first and vocational interests a distant second (if at all).

It also neuters the Seanad as a second house. Given (a) the interest of political parties in making their nominations; (b) the interest of political parties in ensuring the election of their preferred candidates, especially through bloc voting; and (c) the number of vocational senators relative to the Seanad as whole, the Seanad is prevented from having a make-up that would make it an effective second house.

Recommendations

I suggest that the working group recommend that the nomination of candidates for the vocational panels be limited to genuine vocational bodies only. I also suggest the working group recommend raising the bar for persons seeking nomination as candidates to these panels (in terms of testing the constitutional requirement that they have knowledge and experience in these areas).

I suggest to the working group that the franchise for election of candidates to the vocational panels be made universal (not least so as to being it out from under the control of bloc voting by political parties). I suggest also that the ballot paper for elections to the Seanad not show

any party-political affiliation of candidates.

I recommend that when registering, voters make a formal declaration of interest in one panel or another (which they should be able to demonstrate as being genuine). I suggest that a person who is entitled to cast a ballot for more than one panel (vocational or university) should not be entitled to cast a ballot for more than one panel during the lifetime of any given Seanad.

I finally recommend that all Irish citizens, irrespective of where they live (in the State or abroad), should be entitled to vote in Seanad elections and that Seanad general elections should be held on the same day as Dáil general elections.

Seventh Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland

I have not mentioned anything about implementing the outcome of the referendum on the Seventh Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland. I presume the working group will recommend extending the franchise with respect of that.

Kind regards as always.

Oliver Moran