

Senator

Michael McDowell



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Dear fellow NUI graduate,

It has been an honour to represent the National University of Ireland (NUI) constituency in Seanad Éireann since 2016.

I continue to hold the strong belief that we need to strengthen and reform the Seanad for all of the people of Ireland. In that way both Houses of the Oireachtas can play their full parts in the progression of true democracy and accountability as envisaged in the Constitution. Seanad electoral reform has been delayed and denied by successive governments since the people voted to retain the Upper House in 2013 and I will continue to play my part in working to achieve this.

Earlier this year, I played a leading national role in opposing the Government's referendums to amend the Constitution in the Family and Care referendums which were decisively defeated by the people on March 8th. This result showed the importance of a truly independent opposition in matters of profound national importance. It is my privilege to carry out this work as an Independent Senator elected by my fellow graduates of the National University of Ireland.

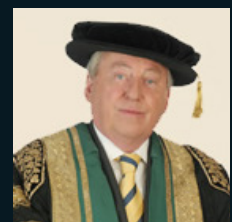
In recent months I have participated in detailed Seanad debates including the EU Migration pact, the Planning and Development Bill, the Defence Bill and the Automatic Enrolment Savings Bill. I have recently introduced a new Health (Scoliosis Treatment) Bill, and am a co-sponsor of the Protection of Children (Online Age Verification) Bill 2024. My work on the Joint Oireachtas Justice Committee and the Special Committee on Scrutiny of EU Directives is ongoing.

My website www.michaelmcdowell.ie is a resource for my latest articles and news. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have a query relating to my parliamentary work or on any other matter.

Yours sincerely,

NEW NUI CHANCELLOR ELECTED

As he retires from the role I wish to pay tribute to **Dr Maurice Manning**, the fifth Chancellor of the National University of Ireland who has served with distinction since his election as Chancellor in 2009. He has enjoyed a remarkable career of public service in UCD, Dáil and Seanad Éireann and as President of the Irish Human Rights Commission. He is currently Adjunct Professor in the School of Politics and International Relations at UCD.



Dr Maurice Manning

Congratulations to incoming Chancellor **Professor Michael B Murphy** who was elected to the role on 17th October. A Cork native, Professor Murphy gained his primary degree in medicine at UCC and has enjoyed a distinguished career in medicine and health sciences and has served as Vice Chancellor of NUI. As President of University College Cork from 2007 – 2017, Professor Murphy oversaw a decade of sustained growth at the university, defining a vision for UCC as a critical regional institution and 'a world-class university connecting the region to the globe'.



Professor Michael B Murphy

SEANAD REFORM DELAYED AND DENIED BY SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS



For more than a decade I have continually campaigned for democratic reform of the Seanad electoral system.

When I and others in the **Democracy Matters** group campaigned for retention of the Seanad in the 2013 referendum, we appealed to the people of Ireland to vote to “**Open It, Don’t Close It**”. The people voted for retention, and advocates of that position immediately set about reforming how Senators are elected.

I continued that campaign upon my election in 2016 and drafted the Seanad Bill which would extend the franchise to every citizen who wished to vote in a Seanad election.

Since then, each successive government has cynically promised but utterly failed to deliver any electoral reform.

Until the Supreme Court found last year in the Heneghan case that the State was obliged to extend the university franchise to all university graduates, absolutely nothing was done. And now a government Bill is before the Oireachtas that would enable all university degree graduates to vote – but only in the second next Seanad election for six university seats, and no vote for other citizens.

Depending on definitions, six university seats would then be elected by those among about one million graduates who register, **but 43 seats will continue to be elected by a party-dominated electorate of 1,283 people** – 234 Oireachtas members and 949 local councillors.

This unfair and cynical system is stacked in favour of the current Government parties and **must not be allowed to continue** after the next general election.

I recently addressed the matter when I delivered the Daniel O’Connell Lecture at the O’Connell Summer School in Cahersiveen late last month and the text of my address can be read on my website at this link www.michaelmcdowell.ie/address-by-michael-mcdowell-to-the-oconnell-summer-school.html

FAMILY AND CARE REFERENDUMS

On March 8th this year, **the people voted No** to the Government’s proposals to amend Bunreacht na hÉireann in the **Family and Care referendums**.

The Yes campaigns were supported by all three government parties and their considerable resources, as well all of the main “opposition” parties. Despite this, the Irish people listened to the arguments and voted No to both propositions by a huge majority.

I played a leading role in the No-No campaign and worked hard to get a nationwide message out that the people should reject these amendments to our Constitution. **Thank you sincerely to all** who supported my position and voted accordingly, and to the thousands of people who contacted me during the campaign.

To my mind, this result illustrated **the value of truly independent opposition** in holding the government to account and scrutinising legislation carefully and free of the whip system.

It is my privilege to carry out this work as an Independent senator in Seanad Éireann.



EU MIGRATION PACT

In June this year the government used the party whip to push resolutions through each House of the Oireachtas to allow Ireland to opt in to the EU migration pact.

I am opposed to the EU migration pact. Ever since the EU assumed competence in relation to asylum and migration issues, it has demonstrated the exact opposite of competence. Uncontrolled asylum seeking acting as a cover for economic migration needs a more radical response than the EU institutions have ever attempted.

The entirely new element of the migration pact is the creation of mandatory obligations on EU member states to share migration flows coupled with financial penalties which can be increased by qualified majority decisions. This is a bad idea and will, if implemented, seriously damage the EU's cohesion, and play into the hands of fringe right-wing groups.

OCCUPIED TERRITORIES BILL SHOULD BE PASSED WITHOUT FURTHER DELAY

The previous Seanad passed the Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill 2018, which was measured legislation that was designed to fly a flag against the creeping annexation of the West Bank by settlers encouraged by the Netanyahu Government. We were frustrated at every angle in progressing it and were told the Bill would breach EU law. At a later stage, when it got to Dáil Éireann, the Members of that House were told it was a measure that required a money message from the Government, which was an entirely spurious foot trip of the legislation. Those of us who passed the Bill, and there was support for it right across this House at the time, were making a stance against the circumstances that were leading to the hatred that is destroying the Middle East. We were standing up for the rule of international law. We were not helped by the Government because it was afraid of being seen as an outlier on the issue at EU level. Much more offensive than that was that an official of the Netanyahu Government called those of us who supported the measure in this House anti-Semites. At this late stage, the Government has now said it will re-examine previous legal advice on the matter. The European Union, by its failure to act and take proper stances, has contributed to the hatred and despair that have brought us to the abyss we now see in the Middle East.



HEALTH (SCOLIOSIS TREATMENT) BILL 2024

I have recently introduced the Health (Scoliosis Treatment) Bill 2024 which has passed Second stage unopposed.

The Bill aims to achieve accountability and performance standards in the provision of scoliosis treatment and provides that *"The Health Service Executive shall establish and maintain a national treatment service for the timely*

and effective inpatient and outpatient treatment of scoliosis within the State at such hospitals and other clinics and centres as it may designate for the timely detection, assessment and remedial treatment of scoliosis for all children and adults normally resident in the State". I look forward to the Bill receiving cross-party support as it progresses through the Oireachtas legislative process.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT BILL

The Government's Planning and Development Bill 2023 which runs to over 700 pages was guillotined in the Seanad and the Dáil in recent weeks. This means that the majority of tabled amendments were never reached at all which is an affront to parliamentary democracy. **I submitted a series of amendments** at Committee Stage which sought

to recognise the critical role played by local government, empowering the minister to maintain certain existing planning regulations and **protecting the rights of ordinary citizens** to make declarations and to be consulted on what happens in their local area.

NUI VOTER REGISTRATION – CHECK THE REGISTER



Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland

Graduates of any member institution of the National University of Ireland who have received a degree (other than an honorary degree), and who are Irish citizens are eligible to vote in Seanad Éireann elections. It is however essential that you are included in the University electoral register and that your postal address details are up to date.

Only graduates whose names appear in the current register are eligible to vote at the time of an election.

In line with legislation, the 2024 revision of the NUI Seanad Éireann register (published on 1 June 2024) will be used for the issuing of ballot papers for the next Seanad election.

Voting papers are posted to all registered graduates, no matter where in the world you live. **If you or graduates you know have moved address** it is important to inform elections@nui.ie

If you or a family member wishes to **CHECK THE REGISTER OR UPDATE AN ADDRESS** please contact my office on 01 6183466 or email michael.mcdowell@oireachtas.ie with the relevant details including name, address, degree, and year of graduation.

If you or your family members require **NUI voter registration forms** please contact me and I will arrange forms to be sent to you by post.

VISIT YOUR NATIONAL PARLIAMENT

I am happy assist in organising tours of the Houses of the Oireachtas for individuals or groups including primary, secondary and third level students, local active age groups, historical societies and citizens who would like to visit our national parliament.

Tours are carried out by an outstanding team of Parliamentary Ushers who have a unique historical and contemporary knowledge of Dáil and Seanad Éireann.

Please contact my office to arrange a date and time, you will be made most welcome.



IRISH ARMY, NAVY AND AIR CORPS NUMBERS HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO DROP TO DANGEROUS LEVELS

The strength of our Defence Forces including the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps has been allowed to wither so that we now have a total strength of about 7500 full-time members – the lowest number since the foundation of the independent Irish state a century ago.

The numbers of reservists have collapsed. As of August 2023, strength of the Reserve Defence Forces had fallen to 1,319 in the Army Reserve, and 81 members in the Naval Reserve, and 280 members of the First Line Reserve – all compared with a nominal, theoretical establishment of 4,069, comprising 3,869 Army and 200 Navy.

In effect, the Irish state now has less than 10,000 trained military members which it could call up in the event of an emergency.

Membership of the Garda Reserve stands at approximately one quarter (371) of its original strength. Over the last ten

years, the size of the Civil Defence service has halved to less than 2,500.

Our navy is largely tied up for want of crews, and we are experiencing serious difficulties in supplying adequate levels of soldiers to serve overseas as personnel for UN peacekeeping and monitoring activities.

We spend less than a quarter of 1% Of GDP (0.24%) on defence while NATO members and other European states aim to spend 2% of GDP – eight times our fraction – on their defence. This is reflective of a national malaise on security that threatens the morale, capacity and number of our security services.

We need to radically alter our attitude to national security. We are acutely vulnerable to any internal or external threat, and I will continue to highlight these issues in the Oireachtas.