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Kenny accepts blame for series of gaffes

Party also forced to admit USC plan will benefit top earners most

Daniel McConnell and Fiachra Ó Ciannáith

Taoiseach Enda Kenny has accepted responsibility for a series of "mistakes" which have blighted Fine Gael's stuttering general election campaign.

The party was also fighting a rearguard action last night as Mr Kenny and Finance Minister Michael Noonan accepted that very high income earners will be much better off in cash terms than lower income earners after their controversial promise to abolish the universal social charge (USC) for all.

However, as the campaign is coming to an end, Mr Kenny conceded he had made a number of "gaffes" during the campaign, but said he was human and man enough to admit he was wrong.

"Actually, as you deal with all of these things, I am human. I make mistakes but I am man enough to accept responsibilities for these things. I think the hallmark of leadership is how you move on from issues like those," he said.

Another senior Fine Gael minister, Leo Varadkar, conceded that Mr Kenny is not the strongest advocate for the party in key speeches like TV debates.

"Enda is not going to win a debating competition but he has other strengths," he said.

However, Mr Kenny and Mr Noonan were forced yesterday to confirm that under their plans, people earning €150,000 a year would be three times better off as those on €40,000 under their USC plans.

Mr Noonan said that while higher earners will benefit more in cash terms, in terms of percentages, the gains are broadly similar.

The USC deals in percentage and if you reduce it you pay a bigger amount on the same percentage on a higher income and if you reduce it you get more relief on a higher income in cash terms. But the percentages are very close," the finance minister said.

Mr Kenny also said pulling the plug on the Government in November would have severed the positive relationship with the Labour Party,

but added, there was a strong urge to go early.

"First of all, had I gone in November I would have ruptured the link with the Labour Party after saying we would have gone the full distance. Secondly we wouldn't have introduced the Finance Bill and other bills. And people would have rightly been critical had we not waited the results of the banking inquiry," he said.

Mr Kenny's position as leader could come under question, should Fine Gael and Labour fail to be re-elected, given they were returned with the biggest majority in the history of the State in 2011.

The difficult choices the parties had to make in office have taken their toll on their support, he said.

"People's expectations rise, this recovery is incomplete. Elections are about choices. We had the most difficult decisions of any government in decades past," he said.

"Four of those polls show Fine Gael are at 30%. Reports we are getting from around the country is that people are examining very carefully and critically the plans that are on the table."

"We feel we can increase on that percentage and transfer that into seats. It is the choice of the people," he said.

The Taoiseach was severely criticised over his admission that he mishandled the appointment of John McNulty to the board of the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Former junior minister and Social Democrat joint leader Bóisín Shortall lashed Mr Kenny's record in office.

"Well look, the story changes yet again. People are looking for integrity in Irish politics, the Taoiseach has been tested several times over the past year, whether that's in relation to Garda whistleblowing, his role in relation to the Garda commissioner's resignation, the McNulty affair, Sitsery who Catherine [Murphy] has been highlighting. There have been umpteen examples where the Taoiseach has been tested and he has been found wanting," she said.

Election 2016: 6-10 Analysis: 13

'SNA cuts take away a child's chance to learn'



Jessica Ni Mhaoláin who was conferred with a masters in government in UCC yesterday. She was born with a vision impairment called oculocutaneous albinism, making it difficult for her to see clearly beyond five feet, and had the help of an SNA for half of her full-time education.

Eoin English

An inspirational college student with a visual impairment who was awarded a masters at UCC has warned the Government against cutting special needs assistant education at second level for her masters in government. She is now considering applying for a PhD.

Jessica Ni Mhaoláin, 24, from Cork, who struggles to see beyond five feet, told the *Irish Examiner*: "Simply put, I would not have finished primary school without the help of my SNA. Cutting SNA hours is taking away the chance for a child to learn properly — and that's just not right."

"The more you cut in the

early years, the more is lost to society in the long-term."

Jessica, who completed a bachelors of science in public health two years ago, studied the effects of legislation on special needs education at second level for her masters in government. She is now considering applying for a PhD.

Her Facebook post on SNAs, from Tuesday night, has gotten over 21,000 likes and 5,000 shares. She said she hoped it would underline the vital need for SNA hours to be maintained, even when funding is tight.

Jessica was born with oculocutaneous albinism, which makes it difficult for

her to see clearly beyond five feet. She also has nystagmus, an involuntary movement of the eyes, which makes it difficult for her eyes to focus.

For the first six years of her primary education at Gaelecoil an Teaghlaigh Naofa, off Kinsale Road, Jessica had to rely only on the sound of her teachers to learn. SNAs were introduced by former minister Micheál Martin in 1999 and she got SNA support from four that class on.

Jessica had to wait until third year in Coláiste an Phiarsaigh before she got further SNA support.

"I had the help to do things I couldn't because of

my sight: notes, explanations, descriptions of what was going on in class," she said.

"Having an SNA put me on a level playing field with my classmates. Every child has a right to education, and it's near impossible for a child to learn if they rely on sound alone, simple as that."

She praised the level of support provided to her at UCC, with assistive technology, extra tuition, and grinds. But she warned politicians to prioritise and protect SNA hours; "What is wrong with this society when it is deemed ok for a special educational needs organiser (SENO) or department official to cut an

SNA from a child for the sake of a financial bottom line?"

"Because while I'm graduating, there will be children and parents who were where my parents once were."

"And they will be wondering whether their child will achieve an education like I have, because an SNA and a chance to learn equally as others do has been taken away from them for the sake of saving money."

Her comments come as parents on the northside of the city are mounting a campaign to prevent cuts to SNAs at several primary schools.

Picture: Michael Mac Sweeney/Provision

Wife assaulted over her cooking

Liam Heylin

A Cork woman was thrown down the stairs by her "perfectionist" husband after she cooked his pork chops in the oven instead of frying them.

Sibhán Kelleher's husband Anthony, 42, was yesterday found guilty by a jury at Cork Circuit Criminal Court of the serious assault of his wife at the family home in Raleigh North, Macroom. The prosecution presented statements taken in writing from Ms Kelleher following the incident on June 12, 2014.

In one, she said: "We were having pork chops that day. I put the dinner on the table. He would never say thanks. He complained that the pork chops were cooked in the oven. He wanted them fried. He is a perfectionist."

She said she went to bed and covered her head with blankets. She said he pulled her out of bed by the ponytail and threw her down the stairs, kicking her on the way down.

"I got to the first landing and he kicked me the rest of the way down. I was out cold and I don't remember anything else until I woke in hospital with a tube down my throat. Anthony came in to the hospital with my slippers and pyjamas. He started crying and said: 'If you had died I would have thrown myself in the river'. I couldn't look at him," the jury heard.

As well as suffering numerous fractures and bruising elsewhere until I woke in hospital, the victim went on to suffer a stroke.

The judge refused Kelleher bail after the verdict.

Anthony Kelleher.

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Divorced parents detained over absenteeism of son, 13

Gordon Deegan

A judge yesterday placed the divorced parents of a schoolboy in temporary custody after hearing a boy had not attended school any day since a previous court hearing.

The pair were held for several hours in the custody area of Ennis court room after being told the 13-year-old did not attend school in the past two weeks.

Judge Patrick Durcan had previously warned the parents would go to jail.

Daragh Hassett, for the boy's mother, said her client was powerless as the boy "will do nothing for her". The mother had lost complete control, he said, and the boy refused to co-operate at any level. He said the boy's mother had sought a judge could to bring the boy to school "bar putting him over her shoulder and placing him at the school gates". The boy has her heart broken.

Mr Hassett added: "The boy is now quite aggressive to her and she can't handle

him as things stand.

"I never seen a case like this where there is a 100% refusal by a child to go to school even though he has been told by you, the Child & Family Agency, his principal, his father and mother and myself that the parents will go to jail unless he goes to school."

The boy's father yesterday apologised for missing previous court hearings in the case, saying he had just re-

turned from honeymoon in Australia with his new wife.

Judge Durcan said: "There may be another honeymoon coming up for you now because you are aware of the seriousness of the problem."

The judge then told the boy: "Be clear on this young man, if you don't perform, unfortunately your mother will have to go away."

The boy has a 80% absenteeism rate from school in the year to date.

Judge Durcan placed the parents in custody to allow a solicitor for the Child and Family Agency to get further instructions on what action in this case today and if I don't have action, I will have to make a decision and order which I will deeply regret having to make."

Kevin Sherry, solicitor for CFA, said: "It is the fifth time that the case has been in court and the child is no closer to attending school."

Judge Durcan said he would like other avenues to be pursued for the welfare of the boy and adjourned the case to March 5.

Judge Patrick Durcan: Parents face jail if action is not taken.

Cranberries star walks free after air-rage incident

Gordon Deegan

Cranberries singer Dolores O'Riordan walked free from court yesterday after a judge said she has not been treated any differently to anyone else who has before his court in similar circumstances.

At Ennis District Court yesterday, Judge Patrick Durcan said it would be "unfair and would be unjust to criminalise" Ms O'Riordan,

who had pleaded guilty to air-rage-related offences at Shannon Airport on November 2014.

Judge Durcan said her actions "occurred when the defendant was suffering from a very severe mental illness".

Judge Durcan said the mental illness from which Ms O'Riordan was suffering at the time "completely inhibited her judgment". He said her not remembering any of the incident shows she

was incapable of understanding or recording what she was doing at the time.

Judge Durcan said if Ms O'Riordan pays for the court port box, he will not impose any criminal conviction on her.

The boy has a 80% absenteeism rate from school in the year to date.

Afterwards, Ms O'Riordan said: "I just want to say I'm glad it's over and I want to thank the doctors who got back my health mentally."

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World

Astronaut Tim Peake made a surprise appearance at the Brit Awards from space via video to present the award for global success to Adele.

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Arts

Hail, Caesar could be considered the Coen Brothers' fourth instalment in what George Clooney affectionately terms their trilogy of idiot.

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O'Sullivan shrugs off predictions

Most pundits say Sinn Féin will win a seat in Limerick. But Jan O'Sullivan is taking the predictions with the proverbial grain of salt. Page: 10

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The Syrian president Bashar al-Assad has assured Russia's Vladimir Putin of his commitment to a Russia-US proposed truce. Page: 11

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Irish businesses have been put on alert about the prospects of prolonged uncertainty facing sterling and the euro. Page: 16

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Frampton looks for quick fight

Carl Frampton has predicted that Saturday night's showdown with Scott Quigg will be one-sided. Page: 28

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sudoku

Sudoku grid with numbers 1-9 and empty cells. Includes 'HOW TO PLAY' instructions.

Sudoku grid with numbers 1-9 and empty cells.

Husband kicked his wife down the stairs

Woman, 36, who later suffered stroke withdrew complaint in court



Cranberries singer Dolores O'Riordan outside Ennis Courthouse yesterday after sentencing. 'I am feeling very good today, very positive about this upcoming year. I have new albums coming out and I am going to go back to work', she said. Picture: Eamon Ward

O'Riordan walks free after judge says she was not treated differently

Gordon Deegan

Cranberries singer Dolores O'Riordan walked free from court yesterday after a judge said she has not been treated any differently to anyone else who comes before his court in similar circumstances.

At Ennis District Court yesterday, Judge Patrick Durcan said it would be "unfair and would be unjust to criminalise" Ms O'Riordan, who had pleaded guilty to air-rage-related offences at Shannon Airport on November 10, 2014.

Judge Durcan said her actions "all occurred when the defendant was suffering from a very severe mental illness".

Judge Durcan said that, after reading several medical reports in the case, the mental illness from which Ms O'Riordan was suffering at the time "completely inhibited her judgment".

He said Ms O'Riordan not remembering any of the incident shows she was incapable of understanding or recording what she was doing at the time.

On his ruling not to criminalise, Judge Durcan said this was the practice of his court in public order-related

I want to thank the doctors who got back my health mentally

When asked about the stigma over mental illness and whether it is time people spoke and opened up more, Ms O'Riordan said "of course" and urged people suffering similar problems to "just reach out for help."

"I'm OK now," she said, adding that she wants "to keep the art flowing".

In the case, Ms O'Riordan, of Friarstown, Grange, Kilmallock, Co Limerick, pleaded guilty to assaulting Garda Shane Dawson and two members of the airport police at Shannon, Ronan O'Reilly and Eamon Power.

Ms O'Riordan pleaded guilty to resisting/wilfully obstructing Garda Dawson in the execution of his duty contrary to section 19 of the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994.

In January, the court heard that an out-of-control Ms O'Riordan shouted, "I'm an icon, I'm the Queen of Limerick", during an air-rage incident at Shannon Airport, where she head-butted and spat in the face of one Garda.

Inspector Tom Kennedy told Ennis District Court that the Cranberries singer also spat in the face of and

Liam Heylin

A man who denied dragging his wife out of bed by her ponytail, kicking her down the stairs or beating her within an inch of her life leaving her with lifelong injuries, was yesterday found guilty of the serious assault.

The jury took less than two hours at Cork Circuit Criminal Court to reach their unanimous verdict against Anthony Kelleher, aged 42, on the charge of assault causing serious harm to Siobhán Kelleher, aged 36, at Curraheen, Raleigh North, Macroom, Co Cork, on June 12, 2014.

Tom Creed, defending, asked for Kelleher to be allowed on continuing bail to put his affairs in order. The prosecution did not oppose, but Judge O'Donnabháin refused bail saying: "His status has irrevocably changed in view of the verdict of the jury."

The accused chose not to give evidence. Ms Kelleher, in effect, did not testify either, but the prosecution went on in the absence of oral testimony.

Ms Kelleher, who suffered a stroke after the attack, walked slowly to the witness box with a walking stick on February 17. She swore on the bible and replied to the first question asked by Siobhán Lankford, prosecuting: "I want to withdraw my complaint."

Following legal argument in the absence of the jury at that point, the prosecution was allowed to go ahead by presenting to the jury three statements taken down in writing from Ms Kelleher following June 12, 2014.

Four days afterwards from a bed at Cork University Hospital, she said: "Last Thursday, June 12 2014, my husband came home from work at about 5.15pm. I had a glass of wine before Anthony came home to calm my nerves. He started ranting and raving and said I was staggering around. I went to bed for an hour. Anthony dragged me out of bed by my hair and threw me across the corridor and down the stairs. The next thing I knew I woke up in hospital."

She added in a second statement: "We were having pork chops that day. I put the dinner on the table. He would never say thanks. He complained that the pork chops were cooked in the oven. He wanted them fried. He is a perfectionist. [After a brief exchange of words] I

went to bed and covered my head with the blankets. He came after me and asked me what did I say. I said, 'Nothing, I'm sorry', I put my hands to my face to save my head. I didn't want bruises. I had my hair in a ponytail and he pulled me out of bed by the ponytail. There were clumps of hair coming out."

He dragged me by the hair and threw me down the stairs. He kicked me on the way down twice in the ass. I got to the first landing and he kicked me the rest of the way down. I was out cold and I don't remember anything else until I woke in hospital with a tube down my throat.

Anthony came in to the hospital with my slippers and pyjamas. He started crying and said, 'If you had died I would have thrown myself in the river'. I couldn't look at him."

In a third statement 10 months later, she withdrew the previous statements, said she fell at the clothes line, and that her husband never laid a hand on her.

Anthony Kelleher told gardai: "I believed she had a drink problem. Siobhán fell down the stairs at our home. She smokes an odd cigarette now and again. She would get very unsteady on her feet... if she has a cigarette. (Later) She fell against the wall."

He denied beating his wife within an inch of her life. Professor Stephen Cusack, who testified he co-wrote CUH's policy on responding to domestic violence said: "All of the injuries are consistent with a fall from a height."

"The injuries included numerous fractures to ribs, spine, finger, wrist and arm, laceration to liver and bruising to buttocks, thighs, trunk, and abrasions to her face. Prof Cusack said he had often seen alcoholics with such injuries."

Judge Durcan said Ms O'Riordan accepted that a serious wrong had been done and approached the righting of that wrong in a responsible, fulsome, and wholesome manner, and had written letters of apology to the victims.

Judge Durcan said Ms O'Riordan's payment to the poor box, along with other payments, will go towards an organisation which assists prisoners prior to release to ensure that their landing is as safe as possible.

Sky's the limit for high-flying drones



Peter O'Dwyer Barcelona

Having fundamentally changed almost every aspect of modern life with their innovations over the decades, technologists are increasingly looking to the heavens for their next challenge.

Unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, continue to fascinate the technology community given the growing world of possibilities they present to consumers and businesses.

As the burgeoning drone scene evolves, much remains to be done before the vehicles reach the performance levels consumers expect.

Two industry heavyweights have signalled their intent to step into the breach and improve connectivity issues at the Mobile World Congress with US wireless carrier AT&T and Intel striking up a partnership that it is hoped will push the boundaries of possibility by allowing drones to travel higher and further than ever.

Connecting drones over a long-term evolution network will help address many challenges the sector faces, including safety and security concerns, real-time communications and potential interference with traditional aircraft, the companies said at the Intel Drone Zone in Barcelona.

The duo's lofty goals include dramatically increasing the distance drones can travel by using a national cellular network as opposed to the limiting short-range networks currently in use, according to AT&T internet-of-things senior vice president Chris Penrose.

"AT&T and Intel will be testing how the network can enable the most exciting business use cases. Our long-term evolution network is uniquely positioned to connect industries like delivery, agriculture, construction, and insurance."

"We're using the network to transfer important information, images and



A man uses virtual reality gadgets to play a game during the Mobile World Congress Wireless show in Barcelona, Spain, yesterday. Pictures: AP



A staff member cleans a Samsung Galaxy S7 during the Mobile World Congress wireless show in Barcelona.

video quickly and efficiently — far beyond the boundaries of short range connectivity," Mr Penrose said.

Removing those boundaries could prove to be a major leap forward for the industry, effectively freeing

drones to travel as far as their batteries would allow. Given long-distance drone flights aren't permitted in countries such as the US though, the authorities will first have to give the test-phase project their blessing

before it can get off the ground properly. AT&T also plans to analyse how drones work at higher altitudes by monitoring functions such as video streaming.

"Intel believes unmanned

aerial vehicles have great potential, from inspections, precision agriculture to deliveries of consumer goods and providing emergency disaster relief."

Intel net technology group vice president, Anil

Nanduri said. The growing interaction of drones and wearable technology was also on show at the mobile industry expo as Japanese electronics company Epson unveiled its latest Moverio to smart glasses.

The Moverio BT-300 are almost 75% lighter and significantly smaller than the first generation of the product launched just five years ago and could help revolutionise drone flights.

Working with drone maker DJI, Epson claims its smart glasses will make flying drones safer and easier by giving the user a first-person view direct from the drone.

The glasses can also assist the visually impaired with their remaining sight, help with medical procedures and enhance experiences such as museum tours by providing additional information.

A somewhat unlikely guest at a mobile conference, Lake quickly showed the value of technological advancement.

Mobile, he said, has helped his organisation tackle disease, fight poverty, and even protect children fleeing the ravages of war.

"Mobile technology provides access to information,

Enlightening technology points to age of inclusion

Peter O'Dwyer

The motto greeting visitors to the world's largest mobile exhibition in Barcelona is another reminder, if needed, of the central role technology now plays in our lives.

Emblazoned on banners hung along the city's main thoroughfare La Rambla are the words: "Liberty, equality, fraternity, and technology for all."

Exalted company for a few phones and gadgets, you might think — except the banners were hinting at something much bigger.

As a product of the Age of Enlightenment and a guiding principle of the French Revolution, the phrase could hardly have been more appropriate as the modern day technology revolution comes times seen as insular, inclusion has been very much to the fore at its showpiece event.

When Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg took the stage to address attendees earlier in the week, he had a clear message for the major mobile players: Help those without internet connectivity before improving the lot of the technologically well-off.

"We believe that everyone should have access to the Internet, and it's kind of crazy that we're sitting here and 4bn people in the world don't," Zuckerberg told the audience.

It was a theme developed by Unicef executive director Anthony Lake in his keynote address yesterday.

A somewhat unlikely guest at a mobile conference, Lake quickly showed the value of technological advancement.

Mobile, he said, has helped his organisation tackle disease, fight poverty, and even protect children fleeing the ravages of war.

"Mobile technology provides access to information,

opportunity, and choice for even the most marginalised children. Give children access to information and they'll be prepared to shape the world around them," said the former US diplomat.

When ebola wreaked havoc across swathes of Africa last year, Unicef was able to issue specific, local information to communities via mobile, in a way radio or television couldn't, which helped stem the spread.

When tackling HIV in Nigeria, the agency was able to determine how much locals knew of the virus and their own HIV status with one simple question, sent to hundreds of thousands of Nigerians via its U-Report text messaging platform, through which it communicates with those most in need of its help.

The same system was used in Uganda, said Lake, when a hit Europe's shores late last year mobile was on hand to help.

Despite often leaving with little more than the Syrian children who Lane encountered clutching, almost without exception, a mobile phone: playing games when they could as an escape from their harrowing experience.

It was somewhat of a light-bulb moment that led to "tech hubs" being introduced to refugee centres. They gave children something to do, a little harder to smirk at.

Liberty, equality, fraternity, and technology for all, indeed.

Debenhams advertisement featuring a woman in a black and white dress. Text includes: 'NEW SEASON SPECTACULAR', 'UP TO 25% OFF', 'EVERY DEPARTMENT WOMEN'S • MEN'S • KIDS' • HOME', '10% OFF BEAUTY & FRAGRANCE', 'Ends Sunday', 'Free Click & Collect to any store'.

WeatherDial advertisement with weather maps for Ireland, Europe, and the Atlantic. Includes text: 'Lines updated 3 times per day 24/7', 'SIMPLY CALL 1550 123 plus', 'www.weatherdial.ie', 'Calls cost €0.97c per min inc VAT. Calls from mobiles may be more. SP ATS Ltd. 0818 200 150 National call', 'WEATHERWATCH', 'EUROPE TODAY', 'EUROPE OUTLOOK', 'HIGH TIDES TODAY', 'IRELAND YESTERDAY', 'SUN AND MOON TODAY', 'MOON PHASE', 'EXTREMES', 'ATLANTIC SITUATION'.

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