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ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY WAY



AUTUMN 2009/SPRING 2010 NORRIS NEWS SHEET

Newsletter

Dear Friends,

Enclosed please find a copy of my latest newsletter to you my fellow Trinity College graduates. As you will see I have tried to give you a cross section of my various contributions to the Seanad and a brief snippet of some of my activities outside the house. I do hope you enjoy it and if you have any matter which you feel should be drawn to my attention please do not hesitate to contact me.

I will also be arranging a series of lunches and dinners followed by a tour of Leinster House during the coming session and would like to ask those who are interested in coming along to contact me (contact details below) so that we can make the necessary arrangements. If you know of any other TCD graduate who may be interested in attending please do not hesitate to let me know. For those who do not wish to attend a luncheon or a dinner I would be very happy to arrange a tour of Leinster House. All you have to do is let me know.

With best wishes

David Norris



Launch of Trinity Green Week 2009

As you may know it has been my honour to open Green Week in Trinity for the last few years, an exercise which I am happy to perform since it highlights the great progress made by Trinity in the areas of fuel conservation, reduction in CO2 emissions and recycling.

This year's slogan was Kill-a-Watt which focused particularly on Energy Conservation. The College looked for 'Energy Champions' to assist in introducing good housekeeping practices in buildings and offices throughout College with a view to reducing overall energy consumption - turning off computers, heaters, lights, etc., will all contribute to making savings on our energy bills. Money saved in this way will then be re-directed to more productive purposes in College. The E3 project a collaborative effort with UCD, DCU and DIT aimed at reducing energy consumption in selected buildings on Campus is continuing with Phase 2 of the project now underway.

For the third consecutive year College is using energy supplied by Airtricity, generated from renewable sources. This green energy is estimated to reduce our carbon output by 12,000 tonnes per annum.

Last year during Green Week we collected in excess of 16 tonnes of electrical/electronic goods for recycling.

A cheque for €4,000 was handed over at the launch to support the Diabetes Unit in the Children's Hospital in Crumlin. This brings to €16,000 the sum donated to this very worthy cause as a direct result of the printer cartridge recycling scheme on Campus.

In late 2008 Trinity again demonstrated its commitment to improving the environment on Campus through the introduction of the solar powered 'Big Belly Compactor bins. We were the first in the country to introduce this form of waste management systems.



Senator David Norris receiving The Lord Mayor's Award from Mayor Eibhlin Byrne, Mansion House, April 2009. Photograph supplied by Jason Clarke
Photographer, Dublin

Recycling

During 2008 in excess of 1150 tonnes of waste was segregated on Campus for recycling.

Please 'keep up' the good work.

Senator David Norris

Seanad Eireann, Dublin 2, Telephone number 01 618 3104, Fax number 01 618 4155, david.norris@oireachtas.ie



Trinity and Education



David Norris presenting Alice Leahy of Trinity with a cheque from funds raised through lunches/dinners with graduates in Leinster House.

I am very proud of Trinity's leading role in university education and research. Our position within the table of the top universities of the world continues to rise within the first 100 such institutions. Trinity continues to lead in research. A new test has been devised for early Alzheimer's Disease, important new discoveries have been made about Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder as well as advances in research into cancer and blindness. There is however the thorny problem of fees for students and their parents. I hold regular meetings both with university authorities and with student representative groups. I tell them the situation precisely as I see it directly and honestly. There is no doubt in my mind that fees are coming in one form or another. In fact it could be maintained that they are already here by the back door via student registration costs. As I have said to those groups lobbying me the real battle is not between the Universities and their students. It is going to be between the Departments of Education and Finance and our position should be to support the Department of Education in obtaining the most positive position possible. I have spoken regularly on this topic. For a more detailed

explanation of my views see for example the Report of the Seanad for 10th February 2009 – Statements on Education Matters. I believe in a universal free education system just as I believe in a universal free health care system. This cannot be achieved in the present circumstances nor in advance of very considerable tax changes. We have to be realistic in facing the existing situation to get the best possible use of our resources.

Ireland and the European Union

I am a strong pro European. But I am genuinely concerned about the growing militarization of the Union. In Lisbon One I was the first person in the Senate to come out in opposition for this reason. I had never done so before. We did secure some changes by defeating the Treaty. The question is are they solid enough? That remains to be decided. I repeatedly raised questions in the House about the European Armaments Group and the possibility of Europe becoming a major centre for the manufacture of arms for export.

Just as in the matter of Extraordinary Rendition the Government dodged and weaved, answered questions that were never asked and refused to answer the questions we did ask. When I said that to a good friend of mine who was very strongly pro Lisbon he said that the Treaty was the most important thing on the political agenda and he didn't care if people were being boiled in oil.

This is perhaps part of the difference. I am an old fashioned liberal and I still do care. Human rights on a global basis are important to me. Have a look at what I said on the subject for example on the 9th of December 2008 during a debate on Ireland's Future in the EU in the Seanad. But we have had some great successes such as the passing of Cluster Munitions legislation and its acceptance internationally. In this the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate played a significant role.



David Norris meeting Ban ki-moon in Dublin Castle.



Ireland's Banking and Economic Crisis

We are in a very serious situation. But it is not divine retribution, it's a man made mess and we can rectify it. I don't believe in endless carping. I try to come up with solutions. In fact I came up with a creative approach something along the lines of NAMA which I called the National Property Management Agency two months before the Government stumbled on the idea. But they haven't taken on board the full package I proposed.

I returned to this message on numerous occasions before the penny finally dropped. Have a look at my contribution to the Investment of the National Pensions Reserve Fund Bill on the 5th of March 09, on the Order of Business in the Senate on the 8th and 9th of April 09, in Statements on the National Assets Management Agency on the 26th of May 09 and in Statements on the Budget on the 9th of April 09.

One of the tragic by-products of the banking crisis was that instead of addressing the issue immediately and coherently the Government's first major response was to set about the coordinated dismantling of all those agencies - Combat Poverty to the Equality Authority who spoke out for the vulnerable in our society. This is a matter I raised repeatedly in debate and took as my Private Members Time on the 4th of February 09.



David Norris launching 'Trinity Neighbours' in TCD.

Role of Seanad Eireann



David Norris, Bloomsday 2009.

The Senate itself as an institution has come under sustained attack recently. It has not in my opinion always been adequately defended in particular there has been a tendency for university representatives to supinely accept the trite accusation of elitism in their constituency. This is a matter I addressed in the Irish Times in a major article on Seanad Reform on the 7th of May 09. **(Also now on my website)**

Civil Partnership:

With a small committee I put together a Civil Partnership Bill which was placed before the Senate five years ago. I instigated a full debate in Private Members Time, but the Government despite repeated assurances kept shilly shallying. I therefore eventually removed the Bill and now demand full civil marriage. The Government after a consistent pasting from myself in the House and outside have now produced their Civil Partnership Bill. Although this does represent an advance it still confers second class status on gay citizens of Ireland. Even worse than that, despite tragic lessons from a series of reports into child abuse, children of such unions, many of whom have already spoken out in defence of their parents, have no rights at all. They are simply ignored. This is nothing other than child abuse by the Government.

My views on these and many other issues which I have spoken on in the Senate can be assessed through my website www.senatordavidnorris.ie



David Norris helping to launch St. James Hospital's Fun Run.



SEANAD

Norris, Mullen clash over exemption of churches from equality legislation

JIMMY WALSH

DAVID NORRIS (Ind) clashed bitterly with fellow Independent Roman Mullen over the exemption of the churches from the operations of equality legislation.

When Mr Mullen suggested that those raising this issue, which were extraneous to the needs and concerns of the victims of abuse in institutions, ran the risk of being accused of acting cynically or manipulatively at a time when "we are all struggling to deal with the grim reality", Mr Norris angrily retorted: "That is a classic smear from you, you smug hypocrite!"

Mr Norris had earlier proposed, unsuccessfully, that the House debate a motion he and Independent colleagues Joe O'Toole, Ivana Bacik, Shane Ross and Fealóg Quinn put forward, calling

on the House to request the Government to re-examine the exemption, which he contended was unsustainable, especially given the latest revelations about abuse.

He wanted Seanad leader Dominic Cassidy to give leadership on this matter. "I know there are significant elements in his own party, including at ministerial level, who completely agree with the position we have taken. The issue should be discussed."

Mr Mullen said he did not see Section 37 of the Employment Equality Act as protecting the privileges of any church.

Mr Norris: "It puts them above the law; that's a privilege."

Mr Mullen: "I see it as protecting the rights of different groups in society, in conscience, to an education that reflects their ethos."

Minister of State John Moloney said he would give a serious commitment to re-examine the exemption clause.

Wording of law to criminalise blasphemy a farce, says Norris

SEANAD REPORT

JIMMY WALSH

DAVID NORRIS (Ind) said he was astonished that the Minister for Justice told the Dáil that legislation to criminalise blasphemy had been drawn up to make it virtually impossible to get a successful prosecution out of it. That was a very peculiar way to be drafting law.

"It is a complete farce, a nonsense and an insult to the intelligence of the Irish people," Mr Norris said he could not give a definition of blasphemy, but he could provide a description of it. "It's one that we all heard and that was printed in *The Irish Times*... when that remarkable man, Mr O'Brien, a former Fianna Fáil mayor of Clonmel, said: 'They raped me, they beggared me, they beat the shit out of me and the next day put the host in my mouth.' That shows the most

extraordinary disregard for God and man. That's blasphemy! The laws were there, but they did nothing to save that unfortunate child. Let's not have a pretence, let's not have a farce, let's have real and properly drafted legislation and forget all this nonsense about blasphemy."

The Bill providing an interim scheme to stabilise the health insurance market pending the development of a longer-term solution passed second stage. Fine Gael opposed it while two Labour members supported it.

Minister of State for Health John Moloney said the main goals of the Health Insurance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2008 were to affirm that the Health Insurance Acts ensured access to health insurance cover was available to all consumers "without differentiation made in respect of age and health status". Lena Cahanoveach Paddy Burke (FG) said €150 million in levies would be taken from

hard-pressed driving them insurance market side of the House call to vote for Eugene Re Government to introduce a primary residence from the past.

"The expense pleasant. The tax did not too equitable our it difficult to identify

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David Norris being presented with a Proclamation commending his dedication to Civil Rights by California State Senator Mark Leno in San Francisco.

Norris honoured in San Francisco

DENIS STAUNTON in Washington

SENATOR DAVID Norris has been hailed in San Francisco as "Ireland's Harvey Milk", a reference to the openly gay politician who was assassinated in 1978 and was the subject of an Oscar-winning film last year.

California state senator Mark Leno, an advocate of marriage equality, presented Mr Norris with a proclamation commending his commitment to civil rights and his successful campaign to decriminalise homosexuality in Ireland.

"It is through the work of individuals such as yourself that equality becomes attainable for all," the proclamation said.

Mr Norris, who was guest of honour at an event hosted by the US-Ireland Alliance, spoke about the role of "ordinary" individuals in the struggle for human rights. He cited the work of unemployed Dublin bus conductor Tom Hyland, who brought attention to

the suffering in East Timor, as well as his own campaign for civil rights for gays and lesbians.

Earlier, Mr Norris told the *San Francisco Chronicle* about how he started campaigning for the decriminalisation of homosexuality at the age of 21.

"I was not going to be pushed to the side because I'm gay," he said.

"We were Irish people. We were gay, and a lot of people thought that was a contradiction in terms... they said, 'just stay quiet.' But I said, 'I've kept it quiet long enough!'"

California voted last year to remove marriage rights from gay couples after the state's supreme court ruled that marriage discrimination was unconstitutional. Mr Norris said, however, that the fight for equality would continue until it was won and rejected the suggestion that it was too soon to demand full equality under the law. "I want the whole lot now, with the cream and cherry on top," he said. "And an apology."

Bank reform calls are ignored,

Aidan O'Connor and Fionnan Sheahan

INDEPENDENT Senator David Norris complained yesterday he only gets heard if he is talking about "James Joyce or burgers".

The senator was calling for a full Seanad debate on the Budget, particularly on the setting up of a new agency to manage the bad loans of banks or "the

national property management agency", as he called it.

"I suggested it in the House four months ago. All the banks must be nationalised. If I am permitted to be heard by being repeated, I wish to point out that I initiated and ran successfully two businesses in this city for many years.

"Yet in many quarters I seem to be heard only if I am tal about James Joyce or bug and I am fed up to my t

teeth with it. I hope there will be some coverage of the proceedings in this House and the important debates to which we will all contribute," he said.

A Seanad colleague of the senator said the current members of Cabinet are all "L'Oreal" ministers because of their reliance on the mantra "because I'm worth it".

a result of Tuesday's Budget pales in comparison to the financial trauma being imposed on the electorate.

"We appear to have supermodels sitting at the Cabinet table. L'Oreal supermodels, to be exact, and not in the way Minister Ahera flutters his eyelashes when attempting to justify recidivism rates or the way

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Seanad reform can benefit Oireachtas



DAVID NORRIS

OPINION

Upper house's expertise must be called on to make wider contribution to decision making

representation does not come about from the commitment given to the House by those elected, but principally from the fact that the ordinary members of their electoral college are given the right to vote. There is an electorate of 50,000 in the case of the University of Dublin and 100,000 in the case of the National University of Ireland.

This means that during the election, instead of traipsing around the provinces sucking up to local crossfitters, the candidates have to subject themselves to the scrutiny of a large, alert and sometimes awkward group of voters who express a wide range of interests outside the narrow confines of partisan politics.

The university seats require to be examined. The representative element needs to be strengthened by extending the franchise to other third-level institutions. I have long advocated this. However, I think that the essential character of the two constituencies should be retained if possible.



David Norris helping to launch Barretstown fundraising campaign 09.