



# News in Brief

Irish Senior Citizens Parliament, 90 Fairview Strand, Dublin 3 tel: 01 8561243 April 2010

## Annual Parliament Meeting 2010 - New Executive

The 14th Annual Parliament Meeting took place in the Liberty Hall Theatre & Conference Centre on 26 and 27 March.



The following Officers and Executive Committee were elected to serve for the coming year.

**President:** Peter Campbell

**Vice-President:** Ena O'Mahoney

**Hon. Secretary:** Evelyn Moran

**Treasurer:** Nell Foley

**Trustees:** John Tierney, John J. McLoughlin

### Executive Committee Members:

Jim Cousins, Anthony Gilligan, Henry Harding, Barney Hartnett, Joe Jennings, Ignatius Martin, Patrick Morgan, John F. Murray, Anna O'Farrell, Breda O'Malley, Patrick Philpott, Séamus Rodgers, Patrick A. Stanley, Gerry Whyte, Jerry Withers



The Annual Parliament was attended by over 240 delegates and observers from all parts of the country. On Friday night delegates attended a dinner and social event.

A presentation was made to the outgoing President, **Sylvia Meehan** (pictured left with incoming President Peter Campbell). She received a standing ovation for her service and a slide show of some of her highlights in the Parliament was shown.

The APM was addressed by **President Mary McAleese** on Friday afternoon, when she thanked the Parliament for its work. Speaking about the Parliament, President McAleese said "it only exists because you care about the quality of life of our senior citizens and care enough to get involved, get organised and insist on being heard ... The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament is a stellar example of older people working for older people and for Irish society, infusing it with their vitality, vision and distilled wisdom." (See full speech on inside pages.)

On Saturday the APM heard a "call to arms" from Parliament CEO, Máiréad Hayes and out-going President, Sylvia Meehan. They stressed the need for all member organisations to fight together in the campaigns to achieve the objectives agreed at the APM. They said the ISCP was up for the fight & that victory can be achieved by standing together and using the passion and skill abundant in Older People.



Jim Quinn, Emer Cosgrave, President Mary McAleese, Jim Eadie and Sylvia Meehan

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## Remarks by President McAleese at the Annual Parliament Meeting of the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament, 26th March 2010

*Dia dhíbh go léir inniu. Tá an-áthas orm bheith anseo libh ar an ócáid speisialta seo. Míle bhuíochas díbh as an gcuireadh agus an fáilte a thug sibh dom.*

Thanks to each of you for the warm welcome to the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament and to President Sylvia Meehan for inviting me.



This Parliament is one of a number of Senior Citizens Parliaments across the EU, providing access to political decision-making at the highest level and enhancing the coordinated and collective voice of older people, in particular those at risk of social exclusion. It only exists because you care about the quality of life of our senior citizens and care enough to get involved, get organized and insist on being heard. Thanks to your individual sense of responsibility and collective efforts, this Parliament has become a recognized and necessary centre of gravity right at the forefront of representing the distinctive needs and perspectives of older people at local, national and international levels. I thank you for giving older people such a structured and effective opportunity to engage actively on the many issues that affect your day-to-day lives.

They say that with age comes wisdom. A lot of other things come along too, things that can change a person's context and priorities considerably. Among the images I have from my teenage days is the memory of the rehabilitation of a small local park into which benches were specially put for the first time for seniors. It was a kindly well-intentioned thought but it carried a subliminal message that those of advancing years were expected to be sedentary and to be spectators. A more recent image points up the changed expectations and ambitions of Ireland's seniors – that is the opening of the first Tone Zone, a public outdoor gym for seniors in Dunshaughlin, thanks to Meath County Council's Tom Dowling and the redoubtable Mary Nally. That good idea has caught on all over Ireland so strongly that the equipment once manufactured in China is now manufactured here. The "grey pound/euro" and "grey ambition" are showcasing their collective power and

their intention to use their lives to the full in new and imaginative ways that enhance its quality and its opportunities.

You have issues that are of special pertinence to seniors, from mental and physical health care to financial and physical security, education, access to social life, the demands of being carers, the demands of being cared for, housing, travel, pensions, the vulnerability to suicide of elderly males in particular and a host of other matters that require a response customized around the changing needs of your constituency. They require careful and insistent advocacy and you have helped bring fresh focus to many of them. However, your remit extends way beyond issues that are of immediate and intrinsic interest to seniors and reaches to the wider sphere of civic and political life where your contribution is needed more than ever.

Living as we are through these humbling days, when we see the ghastly consequences of mistaking a culture of speculation for enterprise, we need wise counsel and determined voices to rouse us from the pit of paralyzing fatalism and spur us on to finding and implementing solutions. Who better to be involved in the national discourse we need right now than those who know from the deep wells of lived lives just how essential individual initiative is and how powerful civic spirit can be in moving through and beyond difficult times.



Our young generation are the best educated we have ever produced, the healthiest, the most ambitious and sophisticated but they face a landscape of diminished returns that they never contemplated having to face. Most of you by contrast faced little else over a lifetime but struggle against tough and implacable odds. You remember many different Irelands in which lives were constrained and even wasted by poverty, lack of access to education, the drain of emigration, the recurring misery of conflict, the attitudinal barricades that held back the potential of women in particular, the narrow biases that kept heads and hearts down. You also remember the leaders who emerged in homes, schools, communities and politics to galvanise the fresh energy and vision that brought Ireland from *ceann faoi* to can do. You know that we face

difficulties not impossibilities and, through these times, your guidance and encouragement are utterly essential.



Already many seniors are filling the gaps in child care, in economic support to the next generation. They are the backbone of

the massive volunteer effort that deepens and enriches civic life in every corner of Ireland through sports clubs, charities, choirs, drama groups, self-help groups, parish teams, adult education, youth clubs, homework clubs and all the rest. For social entrepreneurship our seniors cannot be beaten. It was they who responded to the needs of emigrants to Ireland for befriending and language tuition with the *Fáilte Isteach* programme. It is they who are filling the child care gaps and helping their families through economically vulnerable times. They are the carers for the infirm even at times when they are infirm themselves.

We are extremely fortunate in Ireland to have so many active senior citizens investing in our families, community and country whether through organisations or on their own initiative. They are an often taken-for-granted social asset; a backbone and reliable network of endeavour which adds hugely to our individual and collective coping skills.

The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament is a stellar example of older people working for older people and for Irish society, infusing it with their vitality, vision and distilled wisdom. Sylvia Meehan is a classic example of the surging energy and potential of Ireland's seniors and it was great to see her recognised in 2009 when she was presented with the 'People of the Year Award.' Sylvia's belief that change is possible with focused effort, has been vindicated time and again and I wish her well in her future endeavours.

I congratulate all the members of the Senior Citizens Parliament for being the persuaders for change and the catalysts for change. Life has changed for Ireland's seniors beyond all recognition. There are wide and accessible horizons now that would have been unthinkable a generation or two ago. There is greater longevity and greater ambition to live life to



the fullest possible, to be fully of these times and no mere spectator. They are texting, skyping and

blogging. They are learning new skills and sharing old ones. They are running marathons and running homes, multi-tasking in retirements that put a whole new gloss on the concept of retirement.

Benjamin Franklin once said "We do not stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing". The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament is a repository of irrepressible joy in life, curiosity about life, faith in life and faith in one another. It is about people helping people to live better and to flourish no matter how many miles are on the clock. I wish you well with this annual meeting and continued success in the future.

*Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir.*




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### Challenges for Older People – the Context

**Older People are facing a variety of challenges in their lives today – now more so than ever before.**

2009 brought Irish people the continuing banking and credit crisis, the Nursing Home Support Scheme, the introduction of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), the "Bord Snip Nua" Report, a supplementary Budget as well as Budget 2010, the continuation of the over-70s Medical Card crisis and the withdrawal of the Additional Christmas Payment. There were further threats to cut existing and future pensions and other entitlements as well a promise of further levies.

We face in 2010 the prospect of a Carbon Tax, metered water charges, the introduction of prescription charges and a decrease or abolition in waivers for waste charges as well as VAT on local authority charges. The over-70s medical card debacle continues along with the backlog in renewing medical cards. We also perceive an effort to abolish all Universal Payments and in particular to change some of the entitlements for Older People.

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**Two members of the first Executive of the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament were honoured at APM 2010. Emer Cosgrave and Jim Eadie (pictured on page 1) were thanked for their dedication and vision in helping set up the Parliament in 1996, following on from the European Year of Older People three years earlier and for their service on the ISCP's first Executive Committee.**

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## APM 2010 - Motions

Two **Emergency Motions** were passed at the APM. The first motion called on the Government to address without delay the current **dispute in the public services** due to the effect it was having on Older People in relation to pensions and other social and medical services. This motion was proposed by the Finglas Division of the ISCP and got full support from the delegates.

The other emergency motion demanded that **medical card renewals** for Older People be immediately extended for a period of two years as the HSE figures show that the vast majority of Older People qualify. This motion was passed unanimously and in the context of the backlog – running into thousands – in renewing medical cards. It was also proposed that all new medical cards should be for a three year period rather than the current two years.

### The following motions were also passed at APM 2010 in Liberty Hall Theatre & Conference Centre:

- ❖ **Government Pensions Policy:** Motion 1 called on the Government to restart the consultation process on pensions. Speakers criticised the recently published Pensions Framework.



- ❖ **Pension Protection:** Motion 2 called for the immediate introduction of a Pensions Protection Fund and criticised the proposed Pension Insolvency Protection Schemes (PIPS).
- ❖ **State Pension**

**Contribution Payments:** Motion 3 criticised the unilateral suspension of payments to pensioners who miss a week in collecting their pension. This has only arisen since the replacement of the pension book with a plastic card. The recent rejection of pensions for 85 farmers' wives was also heavily criticised. *(Note that the farmers' wives pensions have since been restored – congratulations Wexford.)*

- ❖ **Additional Payment at Christmas:** Motion 4 called for the reinstatement of the Additional Payment at Christmas. Motion 5 instructed the incoming Executive to make this a priority. Both passed, which meant that Motion 6 fell.
- ❖ **Fuel Allowance:** Medical Card holders should be automatically entitled to the Fuel Allowance.
- ❖ **Living Alone Allowance:** This allowance consists of €7.70 per week added to the pension and has not altered in 12 years. There is a pressing need for a substantial increase.



- ❖ **Universal Social Contribution:** Concern was expressed about the effect of replacing PRSI, the Health Levy & the income levy with a USC & its effect on pensions.
- ❖ **Home Help Services:** Motion 10 praised the work of Home Helps & Carers & called on the Government to support their work.
- ❖ **Financial Abuse:** Older People should be protected from scam artists & cowboys who leave their victims afraid to live alone.
- ❖ **Public Transport:** Downgrading of public transport (bus, rail etc.), especially in rural areas, must be halted.
- ❖ **Universal Health Care:** The APM called for a Universal Health System which provides care for all, free at the point of delivery on the basis of health and social care need.
- ❖ **Medical Cards:** Motions 14-18 all called for the restoration of the medical card to all over-70s and the removal of prescription charges.
- ❖ **Dental & Optical Benefits:** These benefits must be restored.
- ❖ **Stroke Manifesto and FAST:** The APM gave full support to the Irish Heart Foundation's 16 point Stroke Manifesto & FAST Campaign.
- ❖ **Mental Health:** The neglect of public psychiatric hospitals was condemned.
- ❖ **Nursing Home Support Scheme / Fair Deal:** The current scheme should be scrapped & replaced with a scheme based on the 1992 Mercer Report.
- ❖ **Taxes and Charges:** The proposed Property Tax and Water Charges – as they impact on Older People – should be opposed.
- ❖ **Local Government:** Motions 27-30 opposed Water Charges, Carbon Tax and refuse collection charges and called for waivers for Older People. Councils should also keep footpaths free of snow & ice.
- ❖ **Community Support Scheme:** Along with restoring the Scheme, alarms for Older People should be zero VAT rated.
- ❖ **Safety & Security** must be made a priority & the work of the Community Garda was praised.
- ❖ **Taxation of medical costs:** Dental & optical costs should now be allowable for tax rebates.

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Further copies of the ISCP's "News in Brief" are available on request.

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