

Speech by Minister Josepha Madigan to the Dublin Chamber of Commerce

26th October 2018

Good morning everyone.

I am delighted to join you all here this morning and I'd like to thank the Chamber for inviting me to speak as part of its Political Leaders Series.

I know that I am following in the footsteps of a long line of high profile speakers in this ongoing series: our Taoiseach, Finance Minister and Minister for Housing have all addressed this series in recent years.

What is the common thread? We're all Dublin ministers. Along with the wider national interest, Dublin issues are very close to our hearts. I, like so many of you, am a firm believer that Dublin needs as many strong and articulate voices in the Dail and around the Cabinet table as possible.

I was also, before embarking on my career in politics, a principal in a Dublin business – Madigans Solicitors on Molesworth Street. So, I know well the issues facing you all as business people in Dublin.

The Chamber is always very inspiring and thoughtful in the agendas it pursues and the material it produces. I was particularly impressed with the poem the Chamber commissioned from Lewis Kenny and which Peter Coonan recites on You Tube "What will your voice be?"

Yet again you've set the bar high and I will be trying hard this morning to be as inspiring and thoughtful in my comments

I would like to focus on two areas this morning. As this is the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, I will want to run through the business supportive agenda that is central to this Government.

But the Chamber is about much more than just business, it's about ensuring that Dublin becomes a better place to work, live and visit for both current and future generations. So I also want to share with you the quality of life issues that are close to my heart.

Firstly I'd like to briefly discuss two current initiatives that the Government has undertaken to support business.

Brexit

We are doing our utmost to help businesses respond to the challenges posed by Brexit and to grasp opportunities as they arise.

In March, we launched the Brexit Loan Scheme, which provides affordable short-term working capital to eligible businesses to address their Brexit-related. It offers more favourable terms than current offerings on the market, with a maximum interest rate of 4% and unsecured loans up to €500,000.

Up to July, 132 applications had been approved for the scheme and over €2.5 million of finance had been loaned.

We are acutely aware that businesses will also need longer-term supports and so we are also developing of a longer-term Investment Loan Scheme which will allow businesses to strategically invest over the long term, with loans of up to ten years.

Enterprise Ireland is rolling out a series of Brexit Advisory Clinics throughout the year and the Dublin event recently took place in the Aviva Stadium.

Local Enterprise Office funding has been increased by 22%, and this increase is being used to assist micro-enterprises in becoming more competitive and better able to cope with the changing environment in which they are operating.

Future Jobs

Our economy is performing strongly and we are close to full employment.

Each of us here this morning knows though about the challenges we're facing at home and abroad:

- High overall productivity figures that mask underperforming firms and sectors.
- Skills and labour shortages
- Brexit and increased international protectionism

In response to these challenges, the Government is planning a response that will focus on increasing productivity especially in indigenous enterprises; driving innovation across all sectors; sourcing future talent through training and upskilling, and increased labour market participation.

We are holding a Future Jobs National Summit in November. The summit will feed into a *Future Jobs* programme to be launched in early 2019. This programme will prioritise cross-Government actions to ensure that, whatever the future may hold, Ireland will remain a leading and advanced economy that succeeds internationally.

The Arts and Culture

As I said earlier though, the Chamber is about much more than just business, it's about ensuring that Dublin becomes a better place to work, live and visit for both current and future generations.

Much of what I do currently as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and what has been the focus of my work as a TD has focussed around this goal.

Culture is who we are. It defines us and is central to the city we share.

That is why the Taoiseach has made a very public commitment to double spending on culture and the arts by 2025.

The case for cultural investment is strong:

- It is the window through which the world sees us and our country.
- Arts and culture underpin individual wellbeing and participation in them is instrumental to developing individual and collective creativity.
- Artists bring essential qualities of awareness, emotion, truth and creativity to everyday life.

I am immensely proud that one of my first achievements after being appointed to Cabinet last December was securing, as part of Project Ireland 2040, a capital investment of **€1.2bn** for culture, heritage and the Gaeltacht over the next decade.

The video you saw earlier was first shown in April when I had the pleasure of launching my department's plan *Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018-2027 in the National Gallery*. I know its Director Sean Rainbird is here this morning and I want to congratulate him on the world-class refurbishment of the National Gallery. The Gallery should whet your appetite for the investment and upgrade that will take place in our other key national cultural institutions over the coming decade.

Our mission is simple – to create world-class cultural institutions. We will also be protecting and enhancing our built and natural heritage – in simple terms, this means investment in everything from the Dublin Bay Biosphere to the beautifully restored premises at 14 Henrietta Street.

Having a world-class cultural and heritage infrastructure will strengthen our international reputation. We will secure our national literary and archaeological collections. And we will deliver a world-class visitor experience.

We will be investing €460m in our National Cultural Institutions most of which are situated on Dublin's streets. What will this mean in practical terms?

The National Library's 1890s building around the corner from us on Kildare Street will be completely refurbished. This will include enhanced visitor and reading facilities and improved access.

The National Archives building on Bishop Street, which has been full since 2013, will be able to breathe again as we'll be increasing the size of the Archival Repository by two-thirds.

The National Museum of Ireland will see investment of €85m allowing it to develop the Collins Barracks site, as well as develop new galleries and an extension to the beloved natural history museum, or "dead zoo" as so many of us know it.

I also see the director of the National Concert Hall Simon Taylor is here this morning. I look forward to working with Simon in helping the NCH fulfil its ambition to become one of the world's great centres of music. Central to this will be the creation of a refurbished and extended 1,350 seater main auditorium, a new cafe and restaurant and the refurbishment of the historic 1865 block which is currently not in use.

We also have hugely ambitious plans for the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Chester Beatty Library and our National Theatre, the Abbey.

While this massive capital investment is fantastic to see, it doesn't change the fact that those who make and produce art and culture are assisted primarily through current spending.

That's why in Budget 2019 I provided an increase of €6.8m to the Arts Council to enhance its support to artists and arts organisations. This allocation is more than double the 2018 increase and brings Government support for this very important body to almost €75m.

This additional funding will mean that our theatres, dance studios, cinemas and all other cultural spaces will see more artists in residence, large and small-scale festivals, new arts venues and new international co-productions.

A related issue and one that I am currently formulating plans on is in the areas of studio spaces for artists.

Artists are undoubtedly among the groups that are being hardest hit by high rents and a shortage of available suitable property for producing their art.

My Department has had discussions with the Arts Council, Dublin City Council and the OPW to consider some possible short-term and longer-term approaches to the issue, both in relation to specific issues in Dublin and to wider national approaches.

In the coming months I will open a new capital funding scheme for the arts. I intend to include provisions to encourage the development of additional studio spaces for artists throughout Ireland.

Social issues

I said earlier that much of my work as a Minister and TD has been focussed on making Ireland and Dublin a better place to work, live and visit for both current and future generations.

Key to this has been the notable initiatives that collectively make Ireland a more caring and inclusive society.

These values were at the heart of the landmark result of the referendum to remove the Eighth Amendment from our constitution. We listened to the experts, we listened to those affected and the Irish people made an informed, reasoned decision that will make Ireland a more compassionate and tolerant place.

As the campaign co-ordinator for Fine Gael's campaign for a Yes, I was so proud of the resounding yes from the people of Ireland. Over two-thirds of the population voted to repeal the Eighth Amendment, the exact opposite of the vote thirty-five years previously. It was a heart-warming reflection of the caring Ireland that we now live in.

We cannot stop there though.

Today we are being asked to vote on the removal of Blasphemy from the constitution. This is another small step to modernise our constitution so that it reflects the values of its citizens.

Another important date is scheduled for next year. A referendum on reducing the waiting period required before a separated couple can initiate a divorce is pencilled in for summer 2019 following Government acceptance of my private members bill last year.

I firmly believe that there is an appetite for the complete removal of article 41.3.2 from the constitution, so it can be dealt with through legislation. I will be working hard to further this cause.

An issue that is particularly close to my heart is gender equality.

Dublin Chamber is shining a light on this topic with two phenomenally strong female leaders in current President Anne O'Leary and Chief Executive Mary Rose Burke.

I know that in her address to the Chamber's annual dinner Anne said that there has been a moving of the dial in Irish business and, with it, genuine attempts to create a more equal playing field for all.

All of us here this morning welcome and take great solace in those words.

I am proud to say that Fine Gael has a very strong record on gender equality issues. An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has maintained the highest number of female Cabinet ministers in the history of the State. Currently there are four female Cabinet ministers and a female super junior.

We introduced gender quotas that cut funding to political parties if they failed to run at least 30% women candidates at the General Election. We also have more women elected to the Dail than any other party.

I'm delighted to say that this Government is playing a vital role supporting the progress in Irish business that Anne talked about.

In July the general scheme of the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill received Cabinet approval. It will compel employers with a certain number of staff to publish information on the gender pay gap in their firm.

We also launched the *Better Balance for Better Workplace* initiative. An expert group led by distinguished Irish business leaders Brid Horan and Gary Kennedy will report back with actions for Government and business to increase the percentage of women on corporate boards and in senior management in leading Irish companies.

An area that I will be championing at Cabinet will also be the progress of legislation for parental leave.

I will continue to play a leading role in making sure we achieve this change. And thankfully I can lead by example as the average female representation on the State Boards that come under my Department's aegis is 51%. This success is the result of a concerted effort in recent years.

As former American President Barack Obama said "Empowering women isn't just the right thing to do—it's the smart thing to do".

Conclusion

With that, I'd like to once again thank the Dublin Chamber for the invite to speak to you all this morning.

I hope you are as excited as I am about the great benefits that we will all enjoy as this Government delivers on its commitment to arts, culture and heritage.

I will leave you with one of my favourite quotes from John F Kennedy, which for me sums up perfectly the great power of the arts and culture to be a force for good, especially in our politics and public life, "If more politicians knew poetry, and more poets knew politics, I am convinced the world would be a little better place in which to live."