

SEANAD NEWSLETTER

Summer 2014

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Welcome to the latest Newsletter from Senator Ivana Bacik.

I am delighted and honoured to represent the Dublin University constituency in Seanad Éireann. I will also make sure to keep you up to date with the work that I am doing in the Seanad, and would be happy to raise issues there on your behalf.

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Dear Graduate,

Welcome to my latest Newsletter from the Seanad.

This short newsletter provides you with an update on some of the recent work I have been doing over the past year and in the lead-up to the referendum on the future of the Seanad. I am very grateful for all the support I have received from Trinity graduates since my election in 2007, and re-election in 2011. Please do contact me if you would like me to raise any particular issue on your behalf in the Seanad.

I also organise regular tours of Leinster House and would be delighted to invite you to join us on one of those over the coming months.

Do get in touch on ivana.bacik@oireachtas.ie and thanks for your support.

Best wishes,

EDUCATE TOGETHER AND DIVERSIFYING SCHOOL PATRONAGE

As a founding chairperson of the Portobello Educate Together school campaign, I was delighted that our new school opened its doors in September 2013, and that it will be moving to new premises in September 2014. This is the culmination of a long campaign by local parents to ensure greater provision of multi-denominational primary school places in our area. Now that we have achieved this great result, we will be campaigning for the establishment of a multi-denominational school at secondary level in Dublin city centre! For more see www.portobelloetns.org and <http://www.educatetogether.ie>

I also welcome the announcement by the Department of Education and Skills that nine new post-primary schools will open in 2015 and 2016. Out of these, it is wonderful to see that Educate Together will be sole patron in four schools and joint patron in a fifth. This move shows the Department's commitment to providing a diversity of ethos in our schools and it is a move that will increase parents' choices. More needs to be done but this is a step in the right direction. The new schools will cater for an additional 7,300 students in areas of Cork, Cavan, Dublin and North Wicklow – areas that have seen significant rises in the school-going populations. For more information see www.education.ie



Ivana with members of the Portobello Multi-Denominational School Group, Family Fun Day, Sept 2012



Email me to arrange a tour of the Seanad and Leinster House.

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LEGISLATING FOR THE X CASE – THE PROTECTION OF LIFE DURING PREGNANCY BILL 2013

I am very proud to have been one of the leading advocates for the bill to implement the X case test on abortion. Since the legislation was passed in July 2013 and commenced in January 2014, we have at last put in place a statutory framework to protect women whose lives may be threatened by the continuation of their pregnancy - over 21 years after the X case judgment in 1992. The debate however showed the need to go further and legislate for abortion on a wider range of grounds, such as rape, incest, fatal foetal abnormality and threat to a woman's health. To enable such legislation to be introduced, repeal of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution is required. I will be actively campaigning for repeal over the coming years. For more see an Irish Times article I wrote on the subject, at

www.irishtimes.com/news/health/protection-of-life-during-pregnancy-bill-is-not-a-slippery-slope-to-abortion-on-demand-1.1471926

ANNOUNCEMENT OF REFERENDUM ON MARRIAGE EQUALITY

I am delighted that the Government has announced that a referendum will be held in early 2015 for marriage equality. This is a vitally important civil liberties issue and it is long past time that we would have equality in law for the recognition of gay couples and straight couples. The legalisation of civil partnerships was a significant step towards equality, but full equality is only possible when all couples, irrespective of their sexual or gender identities, have the right to marry.

To keep updated on the marriage equality campaign, see www.marriageequality.ie or www.lgbtnoise.ie

PRIVATE MEMBERS' LEGISLATION

Over the past year, I am delighted to have had three private members' bills published, two of which have been accepted by government already. The first is the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2012 which for the first time legalises the solemnisation of civil weddings by Humanists – until now only State Registrars or members of religious bodies could legally solemnise marriage. The first Humanist wedding ceremonies took place in April 2013 following passage of this bill into law. The second is the Employment (Equality) (Amendment) (No.2) Bill 2013, which has now passed second stage in the Seanad and which will amend section 27 of the Employment Equality Act and make it harder for religious-run schools and hospitals to dismiss employees on grounds of conflict with their ethos. The aim of the bill is to prohibit discrimination against LGBT teachers or hospital workers, for example. Finally, in March 2013 I published the Civil Registration (Marriage Equality) bill, which would repeal the statutory prohibition on same-sex marriage. I hope to continue working on this bill over the coming year.

LAUNCH OF OIREACTHAS WOMEN PICTURE IN LEINSTER HOUSE

In December 2008, I organised an event in Leinster House to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the 1918 election (held on 14th December 1918). This was the first election in which women had the right to vote, and in which Constance Markiewicz was elected as the first woman TD and MP.



The event, 'Oireachtas Women 1918-2008', consisted of a ceremony, that took place in the Dáil Chamber. All living former and current women TDs and Senators were invited to attend the Chamber for a photograph and the reading of a speech by Constance Markiewicz.

To read more about the event see www.ivanabacik.com/womeninpolitics/oireachtaswomen.html

In November of 2013, I was delighted to launch the framed picture which will now be on permanent display in Leinster House, and is prominently displayed along the main corridor leading to the Dail Chamber. In early 2014 women TDs and Senators came together in the Seanad Chamber to listen once more to Constance Markiewicz's speech and celebrate the contribution women members have made to Oireachtas Eireann.



Ivana with Minister Joan Burton and Humanist Association of Ireland members celebrating passage of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2012

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION VOTE ON ECONOMIC SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

I was very proud and honoured to be the leader of the Labour delegation to the Constitutional Convention, which concluded its 18 month review of the Constitution in February 2014. At our last session, I was really delighted that, following a comprehensive debate, the Convention voted by 85% for stronger protection of Economic, Social and Cultural rights in the Constitution. A clear majority also voted to make those rights justiciable, so that citizens might take cases before the Courts where their rights have been breached. This is a truly historic result. This could mean the inclusion of justiciable rights such as the right to healthcare, to social protection and to housing in our Constitution. I look forward to a series of different referendum votes on issues recommended by the Convention over the coming year.

SEANAD REFORM

I have always campaigned for fundamental reform of the Seanad and I was proud to campaign for the retention of a fundamentally reformed Seanad over abolition in October's referendum. The role of an upper chamber can be an important one within the legislative process, but to be more effective, complete reform of the Seanad is needed.

I have spoken extensively on the need for Seanad reform over the years. In particular, I support the introduction of legislative change, to provide for

- Expansion of the electorate for the University panels to include other third-level institutions;
- Reform of the Seanad vocational panel electoral process to give citizens a real voice in who is elected.

With these and other legislative changes, the Seanad could become a more democratic and representative structure and could play a more effective role in our legislative process. Ultimately, I would favour constitutional change to enable more radical structural reform of the Seanad. In the meantime, I will continue to play an active role as one of the Senators with the best speaking and voting records in the chamber – and with a strong record of introducing private members' legislation over the years.

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