

SEANAD NEWSLETTER

Winter 2013/2014

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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,

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 chairperson of the Portobello Educate Together school campaign, I am delighted to announce that our new school opened its doors in September 2013. This is the culmination of a three-year 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 - 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. Now that the legislation has finally been passed as of July 2013, we have at last put in place a statutory framework to protect women whose lives may be threatened by the continuation of their pregnancy – 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 my recent Irish Times article on the subject, at <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/protection-of-life-during-pregnancy-bill-is-not-a-slippery-slope-to-abortion-on-demand-1.1471926>

SEANAD REFERENDUM OCTOBER 2013

Having campaigned actively for a No vote in the referendum to abolish the Seanad, I was delighted that it was defeated and that the Seanad will be retained. However, I have long called for fundamental reforms to be made to the composition of the Seanad, and believe that legislation should be introduced without delay to make it a more democratic institution. To read more about my ideas for Seanad Reform, see back page of this newsletter or click on <http://www.ivanabacik.com/seanad/>

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 and one of which is now law. 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 in 2014.

NEW SCULPTURE CELEBRATING THE LIFE AND WORK OF ERNEST WALTON UNVEILED IN TCD

I was delighted to be present at the unveiling of Eilis O'Connell's wonderful Walton sculpture at the Trinity Physics Department in November 2013. The sculpture was unveiled by Minister Ruairi Quinn, and celebrates the life and work of Ernest Walton, TCD graduate, former TCD Professor of Physics and Nobel laureate.



LAUNCH OF OIREACTHAS WOMEN PICTURE IN LEINSTER HOUSE

In November 2013, I was delighted to launch the framed photograph of the 'Oireachtas Women 1918-2008' event. This photograph will now be on permanent display in Leinster House, in prominent position along the main corridor leading to the Dáil Chamber.



The photograph depicts an event I organised in December 2008 to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the 1918 election (14th December 1918). This was the first election in which women had the right to vote, and in which Constance Markievicz was elected as the first woman TD and MP. I invited all living former and current women TDs and Senators to attend the Dáil Chamber for a photograph and the reading by former Senator and Supreme Court Judge Catherine McGuinness of a speech by Constance Markievicz.

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



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

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 – the right to marry for gay couples is long overdue. The legalisation of civil partnerships was a significant step forwards, but full equality is only possible when all couples, irrespective of their sexuality, have the right to marry.

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

SEANAD REFORM

I have always campaigned for fundamental reform of the Seanad and was proud to be actively involved on the 'No to abolition' side in the October 2013 referendum. I was delighted with the result – I believe that the role of an upper chamber can be an important one within the legislative process.

But to be more effective, I believe that fundamental reform of the Seanad is needed. In particular, I have called for legislation to:

- Expand the electorate for the University panels to include other third-level institutions;
- Reform the Seanad vocational panel electoral process to give all citizens a vote.

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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