President dissolves 31st Dáil

Last Wednesday, 3 February, Taoiseach Enda Kenny requested that President Michael D. Higgins dissolve the 31st Dáil. The General Election for the 32nd Dáil will take place on 26 February; this will be the shortest election campaign in the history of the State.

Anyone not already on the electoral register must now make a submission to get on the supplementary register. However, the deadline for this is no less than 15 days before polling day (excluding Sundays). This means that all forms must be completed and returned to local city or county councils by close of business tomorrow, Tuesday 9 February.

If you do not appear on the register at all, the appropriate form is usually the RFA2 form; for those wishing to change their address or details on the register, the RFA3 form will be needed. These must be stamped at your local Garda station. To see if you are on the register, you can visit ChecktheRegister.ie.

Also, ahead of the election, the Standards in Public Office Commission have released their guidelines for candidates and election agents. These can be found on their website. Any questions regarding these can be forwarded to the Offices.

The 32nd Dáil is due to commence on 10 March.

HSE internal memo: “X out before Y in”

An internal memo, written by HSE director general Tony O’Brien two weeks ago, was released this week. In it, details of restrictions to recruitment of staff for the health service were revealed. According to the memo, senior management agreed in mid-January to new interim employment controls that were put in place as of the beginning of this month.

The policy, according to the Irish Times, will involve an “X out before Y in” exchange, instead of hiring additional staff.

The past year has seen huge boosts in recruitment in the health service. Some 4,550 additional full-time personnel were hired in 2015, 358 of these in December alone. This included consultants (100), non-consultant hospital doctors (almost 400), nurses (over 800), support staff (almost 1,000) and therapists (200). However, in his memo, Mr O’Brien said that “this type of growth is simply unsustainable.”

Each sector of the service operates on pay allocation budgets per sector, and they must adhere to them.

Mr O’Brien went on further, “As vacancies arise, each division will be expected to use the vacancy opportunity to reform and reduce the costs of their respective workforces. They should look at skill-mix and substitution in order to achieve more cost-effective methods of delivering existing levels of service.”
Tourism Ireland board review big year ahead

The new board of Tourism Ireland has met for the first time. The meeting took place on Thursday 4 February in Dublin. With the centenary of such an important year in Irish history upon us, and following the success of 2015, this year will hold big things for the Organisation.

The new board, all of whom were elected by the North South Ministerial Council, took the opportunity to discuss 2016’s upcoming season.

CEO of Tourism Ireland, Niall Gibbons, said that they hope 2016 will be another “record-breaking year” for overseas tourism into Ireland.

He went on to further detail, “Our activity includes unveiling Ireland’s Ancient East, while continuing to place a major focus on the Wild Atlantic Way. We will promote Dublin and the Star Wars connection with Ireland and will also work with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to highlight Ireland 2016 to people everywhere – showcasing major new attractions and the year’s signature events.”

The new board contains members from Aramark, Aer Lingus and Ryanair, as well as representatives of the Irish hospitality and cultural sectors.

Green homes, more jobs

Alex White TD, Minister for the Environment, along with two of his colleagues, have launched a plan for green jobs. The plan, entitled “Growing the Green Economy”, was launched yesterday, Sunday 7 February.

In the main, the plan proposes the following key points:

- A Green Infrastructure Fund of €1bn should be established;
- The retrofitting of 225,000 homes – an expansion of the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme. It is estimated that this work will save €39m in annual household bills, and will create 13,000 jobs over the next five years;
- Focus on greener public transport systems; and
- Creating a new forum for Community Energy Engagement.

Minister White noted that there are more benefits to being green than just the environment. “The green economy will create and sustain thousands of jobs in the domestic economy and the export sector.”

Cllr Carrie Smyth, at the announcement of the plan, stressed how important it was to “leverage green policy to help generate more jobs and stimulate growth in sectors such as construction and energy services”.

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The 31st Dáil has been dissolved by the President.

The President will summon the new Dáil on Thursday 10th March 2016.

Seanad Éireann adjourned sine die.

Following the dissolution of the Dáil, Dáil committees and Joint committees are also dissolved.