

Donegal's Progressive Independent

Thomas Pringle



**“For Donegal.
For the People.”**

Think Independently Vote Independent

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Thomas Pringle General Election 2020

A Chairde,

Donegal is a unique and beautiful place that we all love, whether we were born here or have chosen to live here. One of our strengths is our long tradition of independence and self-reliance, forged over many years of being neglected by successive governments, isolated by the partition of the border, and our remoteness from Dublin. We've had to go it alone and do things for ourselves.

My manifesto reflects that, written for the people of Donegal and informed by the communities and organisations I've worked with during my time as a public representative. The document is responding to real issues from real people as they experience them. It's an independent perspective I believe is missing from mainstream politics. I want to put that front and centre in policies for the people of Donegal.

As an independent TD I have had the honour of representing Donegal and fighting for the interests of Donegal. I am not tied to any party line and don't have to compete with the interests of party TDs from other parts of the country. I believe that being an independent and progressive TD is in the best interests of building a future for people in Donegal.

I am known as a plain-speaking and principled public representative who is not afraid to say what I think and people always know where I stand on any issue. We may not always agree on every issue but at least that way we can have an honest and open conversation about it. This is why I have produced this manifesto, which sets out the priority issues and solutions that I will pursue in the next Dáil so that I can continue to deliver for the people and for Donegal.

I will continue to work throughout the county alongside community activists and organisations and make myself available to constituents at my constituency offices and regular drop-in sessions. Myself and my team are always on hand if people want to have a chat or need assistance with anything.



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Health & Care in the Community

Donegal is experiencing a recruitment crisis in health. Over 100 public health posts lie vacant due to Fine Gael's HSE recruitment freeze. The longer the recruitment embargo goes on, the more it will cost as people linger for longer on hospital waiting lists, become sicker and care becomes more expensive as a result. Under Fianna Fáil we received a two-tiered health system. Fine Gael have increased the role of private health care in this country. Healthcare is no longer based on need, it's based on your ability to pay. I have proposed many times in the Dáil legislation that would make the right to health care protected in our Constitution but each time it was voted down by the two main parties.

Sláintecare must be fully implemented Healthcare needs to be brought back into the community in the form of primary care centres, community hospitals, centres of excellence and satellite centres. We also need to take better care of our carers. Below are solutions to each aspect of the health service I want to see prioritised. It doesn't cover everything I want to see changed but does address the main issues constituents have come to me with over the years I have been a TD. Unfortunately for many, these same issues remain unresolved.

Carers, Home Help & Respite

Supporting carers is paramount to enabling people, particularly older people, to live within their communities and is much more cost-effective than putting people into expensive nursing homes. There has been a crisis of available respite care for families, carers and service users in Donegal which must be addressed immediately if we are to adequately care for our carers.

MY SOLUTION:

- Establish a Statutory Home Help Service so everyone has a right to home help.
- Commit to implementation of the National Dementia Strategy (NDS).
- Continue to mobilise public support and public resources on dementia.
- Sufficiently fund home help hours and home help packages.
- Increase supports and respite care options for carers and families with disabled children or life-limiting conditions.
- Expand respite care availability to seven days a week throughout the year for families and service users.

Mental Health

Addressing mental health issues in Donegal seems take 'two steps forward and one step back'. Partner that with the historic difficulty in recruiting staff now exacerbated by the HSE recruitment ban and we are left with the bare minimum of mental health services in Donegal. CAMHS has been struggling to meet the needs of children and

adolescents struggling with mental health issues and suicide rates remain too high in Donegal.

MY SOLUTION:

- Invest in community mental health services, particularly for children and adolescents.
- End the recruitment embargo so more staff are made available and work.
- Implement a new Vision for Change strategy that would bring about 24-hour community access to mental health care.
- Reduce waiting lists for children and adults while investing in early intervention to reduce and prevent suicide.

Cancer services & women's health

Women's health has been the subject of too many scandals and needs radical reform to meet the needs of women, particularly in rural areas like Donegal. Services like ante-natal, maternity and gynaecological care have been moving to LUH and away from community settings. Furthermore, cancer screening delays and diagnosis are taking a hit and need to be addressed as a matter of urgency so lives can be saved.

MY SOLUTION:

- Ensure quality access to gynaecological services at LUH and in community hospitals.
- Restore ante-natal health care in community hospital settings.
- Address waiting times for Breast Check.
- Deal with outstanding Cervical Check access issues.

Letterkenny University Hospital services

It's a known fact that out of the eight Centres of Excellence established across the country, not one of them is within reach for patients in Donegal. Same goes for satellite centres - we are still lacking a sufficient number of them to deliver on patients' health needs in the north west. I've worked closely with health campaign groups calling for an increase in staff and services available at LUH.

MY SOLUTION:

- End the HSE recruitment freeze and hire key hospital staff.
- Address chemotherapy waiting times at LUH.
- Set up a Prostate Rapid Access Clinic at the hospital.
- Reverse 'deliberate' downgrading of services such as urology at LUH.
- Employ an additional seven adult endocrinologists at LUH to address diabetes waiting lists.
- Fill in the long overdue podiatrist and dietician posts at the hospital for diabetes care.

- Establish a Diabetes Centre and a Centre of Excellence with Sligo University Hospital.

Hospital overcrowding

I have been known to get angry in the Dáil on this topic but can only imagine the frustration of many patients waiting on trolleys or waiting to be released back home. We have the solutions; politicians just need to get on with implementing them.

MY SOLUTION:

- Increase home help hours, home help staff and better fund home help packages to release patients waiting unnecessarily in hospital wards.
- Support nurses and midwives on their call for fair pay and conditions, a safe working place and for patient safety.
- Address ambulance delays (more below) to help alleviate overcrowding.

Community Hospitals

Access to community health services in Donegal has been eroded under Fine Gael. It is time to put the health needs of communities at the centre of Government policy. The greater the access to health locally, the less demand will be put on services in Letterkenny University Hospital. I want to see community hospitals maintained and upgraded so that quality health care is a feature of every town and village across Donegal.

MY SOLUTION:

- Upgrade and maintain existing community hospitals.
- Develop new community hospitals where communities have campaigned and where the need has not been met under Fine Gael.
- Restore ante-natal and maternity services to community hospitals to reduce travel times and reduce demand on LUH services.

Ambulance service

Donegal requires at least three additional ambulance crews in Inishowen, Donegal (Killybegs) and Letterkenny to meet the needs of Donegal residents. Waiting times for ambulance assistance is far too long but the Government has refused to address this. As a result, people are not seen to in time.

MY SOLUTION:

- We need a national ambulance strategy and a strategy specific to Donegal.
- Ambulance delays are partly caused by hospital discharge delays which need to be addressed on arrival.
- Action required in relation to industrial disputes allowing NASRA to be recognised by the HSE as the union of choice for staff.

Housing & Homelessness

In October 2019, the number of people homeless in Ireland reached 10,500 for the first time. Affordable public housing is crucial to meeting the needs of society, but Fine Gael have utterly failed to deliver.

Hidden Homelessness

In the North West region, there was a 44% rise in the number of people in homelessness between June 2016 and September 2019. Many are “hidden homeless”, in that they are stranded in inadequate or emergency accommodation, facing eviction or unable to pay rent. Fine Gael’s *Rebuilding Ireland* plan has invited the further privatisation of housing provision rather than delivering homes for families in crisis.

MY SOLUTION

- A credible housing strategy that reduces reliance on the private sector for the provision of housing.
- Increased funding for local authorities to empower them to build social housing.
- One-night emergency accommodation should be replaced by more stable placements to take into account the needs of families in homelessness.

Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)

Fine Gael’s housing policies are built around the private sector. As of October 2019, the State had paid €612m to private landlords in HAP payments. It is estimated that one fifth of the 2020 housing budget - around €500m - will be channelled towards private landlords. Caps on HAP limits were last set in 2016, despite rents around the country having risen by 5.2% in the last year alone. Around half of the almost 50,000 HAP recipients are paying top-ups directly to their landlords because HAP doesn’t cover their rent. This extra money eats into utility bills, childcare costs and other necessary household expenditures.

MY SOLUTION:

- Carry out a comprehensive review of the HAP system.
- Raise HAP limits in line with market rents, with the interests of tenants, rather than landlords, at the centre.
- Implement much needed reforms to improve the administration of the HAP scheme.

Fuel Poverty and a Just Transition

Over 30,000 people suffer from fuel poverty in Donegal. If Ireland is going to get serious about climate change and a just transition, we need to urgently allocate

funding for the adaptation of housing through sustainable insulation and heating solutions.

MY SOLUTION:

- Allocate adequate funding for a deep retrofit scheme for housing, along with practical alternatives to burning solid fuel. This will also assist with bog rehabilitation and improve air quality in the region.
- Enforce minimum energy efficiency standards for the private rental sector with clear targets.
- Tackle fuel poverty at the local level, with a pilot scheme of community energy advisors.

Flood Relief

While I welcome funding made available for flood defences for a number of communities, a significant number of people remain vulnerable to increasing floods and storm damage. The 10-year capital plan is too late for many and I want to see timely funding granted to residents throughout the county.

MY SOLUTION:

- I will fight for comprehensive flood relief schemes to cover all areas of Donegal affected by increasing floods and storm damage, to ensure timely and sufficient grant aid.

Mica Redress Scheme

For seven years mica-affected homeowners have had to deal with a sluggish response from Government. In the meantime, homes have been degrading further, pushing up costs for many families affected. Although the Mica Redress Scheme is set to run after numerous delays on the part of Fine Gael, outstanding issues remain. I want to address these outstanding issues as a matter of urgency. It's the least homeowners deserve after witnessing their homes degrade, plummet in value, and become uninsurable.

MY SOLUTION:

- Deliver the long-awaited Mica Redress Scheme.
- Address insurance cost issues for homeowners affected.
- Ensure timely implementation of the scheme by Donegal County Council.
- Provide 100% grants for mica-affected homeowners in line with North Leinster.
- Meet the temporary accommodation needs of mica homeowners.
- Amend the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act to relieve mica homeowners of property tax.

Town & Village Renewal

Rural depopulation is a blight on rural Ireland, a result of Government policies focusing overwhelmingly on urban centres to the detriment of rural communities. Fine Gael policies uphold the belief that the country can't profit from an investment in rural Ireland, but I think the opposite is true. If you invest in rural Ireland you're investing across the board and even cities like Dublin or urban hubs like Letterkenny will benefit equally. We need a return to investing in public services including post offices, Garda stations and GPs and we need proper supports for local businesses and employers to keep rural economies going.

Local businesses

I carried out a survey of local businesses across Donegal and spoke with those employing up to five employees, such as local hairdressers, butchers and newsagents. Although small businesses are slowly emerging from the recession, they face huge obstacles due to the lack of Government policies and initiatives to boost rural economies. Fine Gael has introduced policies which lead to depopulation, directly affecting the sustainability of businesses in rural areas.

The persistent issues faced by the small businesses surveyed include:

- An overwhelming majority of respondents were not aware of any Government initiative to help improve local businesses.
- Widespread concern about the impact of rural depopulation and the closure of services (i.e.: post offices, banks) on their business.
- Commercial rates anomalies related to location and size of the businesses.
- A reliance on social welfare payments for many business owners who are not making enough profits.
- A heavy administrative burden on small businesses who are ill-equipped to deal with bureaucracy.

MY SOLUTION:

- Stave off depopulation first and foremost to generate more footfall locally.
- Increase awareness of State supports for businesses as well as outreach work of Local Enterprise Offices in Donegal.
- Make training supports for online promotion and marketing available to smaller businesses.
- Address anomalies and inequalities in commercial rates.
- Take into account the social welfare needs of business owners starting out.
- Reduce bureaucracy and administrative burdens on small businesses.

Public Services

The anti-rural policies of Fine Gael have devastated rural towns and villages, leading to a dwindling post office network, fewer garda stations and fewer GPs. Over 159

post office closures have taken place in rural Ireland with 17 closures in Donegal alone. Social welfare contracts with post offices must be protected.

MY SOLUTION:

- Need to curb depopulation trend with county-specific job strategy.
- Develop local trade for small businesses not primed for export.
- Retain vital rural services like post offices, Garda stations, GPs and banking facilities.
- Protect social welfare contracts with post offices and roll out new services to increase business across the network.
- Invest in public transport and in a state-owned National Broadband Plan, which prioritises rural Ireland, communities and local businesses.
- Increase supports for GP centres in rural areas so they can keep their clinics open.

Rural Transport

The North West is the only region in Ireland without a rail connection, or a major motorway or dual carriageway. The lack of good connectivity by rail and road limits the potential growth of towns and villages and makes it harder to keep business in their centres. It also affects the population of an area as people move to where the jobs are, in urban centres that get all the IDA funding and grants from central Government. Donegal has been left out of capital investment programmes over many decades and Fine Gael has done nothing to change that.

MY SOLUTION:

- Upgrade the A5-N2 motorway as has been promised since 1998.
- Establish an accessible local network of rural bus routes that loop around and between towns, keeping business in the locality and stimulating local development.
- Facilitate a rural public transport network linked to park and ride facilities, cycleways and new connected car-sharing services as part of our transition away from the use of cars as we move to a low-carbon economy.
- I successfully proposed for inclusion within the Climate Action Committee Report the need to radically expand rural public transport in Donegal and will continue to take every opportunity to keep this issue on the agenda.

Broadband

Fine Gael's latest move on the National Broadband Plan reveals their inability to manage fiscal projects in this country. Once again Fine Gael are dedicated to giving away one of the few state-owned national infrastructure projects to the private sector, and we are paying €3b for that privilege.

MY SOLUTION:

- I will seek an end to the privatisation of this resource and a new Broadband

Plan expedited to rural towns and villages, islands and isolated areas first and foremost, to maximise jobs potential in Donegal.

Climate Change

The Climate Change Crisis is the defining issue of our times. It is going to affect every aspect of our lives and must be responded to as a top priority. The Irish government's approach has been nothing short of reckless to date: emissions have continued to increase, instead of decreasing, and tax-based policies are only making the transition harder for low-income families. In the meantime, more frequent flooding and extreme weather events will affect more and more communities, particularly in Donegal.

It is my belief that climate change is caused by an over-reliance on market-based policies. Corporate greed and rising levels of consumption are leading to biodiversity loss and pollution. Tackling emissions requires a fundamental shift away from fossil fuels such as coal, oil, gas and peat but this must be managed in a way that is fair to all. The economy must be transformed to give people real, low-carbon choices, such as affordable, accessible public transport and sustainable livelihoods, whether they live in urban or rural environments, and facilitate community-led, non-market-based solutions.

As a TD and member of the Oireachtas Climate Action Committee I have successfully passed legislation forcing the Government to act on the issue. My Fossil Fuel Divestment Act, which had unanimous, cross-party and Government support, made Ireland the first country in the world to stop public money being invested in oil and gas companies. The Act reflected my belief that the responsibility of climate change does not lie with individuals alone but rather with global oil and gas companies, and the politicians that have the power to act. This legislation was also successful in responding to grass-root demands and forcing the political parties to respond to the people. The success of the Act also proves that Independents can successfully use their skills as legislators to force the Government to respond to the urgency of climate chaos.

As a member of the Climate Action Committee I was instrumental in ensuring that the Climate Plan will increase the share of renewable energy on the grid from around 30% to 70% by 2030 using offshore wind and solar energy.

MY SOLUTION:

- Support a new Climate Act that will deliver at least 8% cuts in emissions per annum, in line with climate science and the Paris Agreement, so that Ireland reaches net zero emissions well before 2050.
- Improve supports for, and financing of energy efficiency schemes for homes and businesses, especially those with the lowest BER ratings.
- Increase the Fuel Allowance with the proceeds of the carbon tax to tackle fuel poverty.

- Make sure the transition to a low-carbon economy is socially just, and that Bord na Mona and ESB workers are protected via a Just Transition Taskforce.
- Ensure sufficient funding is available to allow local authorities to complete the energy retrofitting of social housing stock and set a target of upgrading all existing stock in the next four years.
- Increase subsidies and supports for rural public transport to provide a greater range of options such as bus links across the county and incentivise greater public transport usage with more frequent services, real time information, accessibility and improved connectivity.
- Use the polluter pays principle to ensure that corporations pay the full cost of the environmental damage that they are responsible for. Primary responsibility cannot be put on individuals to act and bear the cost of what is ultimately a crisis caused by Government inaction to date.

Wind farms and renewable energy

During my time in the Dáil, I have consistently called for a moratorium on onshore wind farms. Donegal is already at maximum capacity for onshore wind farms, and no new schemes should get planning permission. I successfully won the support of all the other parties for a renewable electricity target of 70% by 2030, but this must be delivered in ways that win community support.

MY SOLUTION:

- New renewable energy projects should focus on upgrading existing sites, developing the North West's huge offshore wind resource, solar energy, and bioenergy from sustainable sources.
- Develop Donegal's potential for pumped storage schemes to support renewable electricity.
- Allow communities to benefit directly from renewable energy schemes with up to 20% stake in private projects.
- Ensure that all of Donegal's schools have rooftop solar energy by 2025.

Education

During my time as TD, I have consistently fought to ensure an inclusive education system to meet the needs of both students and teachers at all levels of education in Ireland. I believe that all students should be entitled to a high-quality education free of charge, and that it is the State's duty to remove financial barriers.

Primary School

Primary School class sizes in Ireland are five times above the EU average and our most disadvantaged schools have not had a reduction in class size in many years.

MY SOLUTION:

- Commit to an annual reduction in class size for all primary schools in Ireland.
- Bring the primary school capitation grant up to the level of secondary school.
- Increase availability of resources and funding to reflect work carried out by primary school leadership teams (principals, deputy principals and assistant principals).
- Pensions of retired teachers should be increased in line with the pay of those still teaching.

Secondary School

I am fully behind the secondary teachers' ongoing campaign against pay inequality. It is unacceptable that new secondary teachers are still earning 10% less in their first 10 years than they would have done before austerity. I also want to see an end to schooling in pre-fabs, with a capital programme to upgrade schools.

MY SOLUTION:

- End prefab classrooms in Donegal
- Support school secretaries in their fight against the two-tier pay system.
- Ensure payment of the HDip/PME allowance to those who started teaching since 2012.
- Allow teachers to commence their career at point 3 of the scale in recognition of the six-year (primary degree and PME) unpaid training period.
- Eliminate remaining differences in the early points of scale for 'new entrant' grades.
- Expand DEIS scheme in Donegal to reflect widespread social and economic disadvantage.

Third Level

Ireland has the second highest university fees in the EU, making higher education unattainable for many. State funding per third-level student is still 40% lower than it was a decade ago. Austerity cuts resulted in increased student registration fees and

cost-cutting measures at universities, while SUSI grants have not increased in line with the rising cost of living.

MY SOLUTION:

- Restore core funding to third-level education, and for the transition to a publicly funded model whereby student contribution fees are abolished.
- Prevent introduction of a student loan scheme, a disaster in other countries.
- Extend the SUSI Special Rate to working families.
- Provide supports for cross-border students on level 5 QQI equivalency courses. Thousands of Irish students still have no access to state supports when studying in N. Ireland.

Special Needs Education

Many children and teenagers with special needs in Donegal are being left out of the education system. This is a disgrace in a modern country like Ireland.

A vital part of addressing special needs education is acknowledging that Special Needs Assistants are the vital links between children with special needs and their school community. This important relationship should be protected and supported in every way. However, cuts imposed on SNAs to date have disproportionately impacted on children with disabilities and their future prospects as a result.

MY SOLUTION:

- Increase access to classes for children with special needs.
- Reverse cuts to SNA provision and expand the numbers available.
- Ensure individual education plans exist for all children with special needs.
- Improve school infrastructure, provide better teacher training and place an obligation on schools to be fully inclusive.
- Get adequate assessments of the number of ASD classes required to meet demand.
- Research how they are spread geographically to ensure that children in Donegal are not required to travel large distances to access them.
- Review EPSEN legislation ensure that it is up to date.

Farming, Fishing & Island Communities

As a TD I have fought to protect the livelihoods of fishermen, farmers and island communities in Donegal. My role on the Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture was a platform to raise concerns of those working in these areas. Now, in the wake of Brexit and the EU-Mercosur deal, we must do everything in our power to protect our fishing and farming industry from changes abroad.

Fishing

Irish fishing rights have been significantly weakened under Fine Gael. Legislation was introduced that further disadvantaged Donegal fishermen in the context of Brexit and legalised the exploitation of a number of dwindling fish resources, such as mussel seed and clams. These dwindling stocks have been decimated by European fishermen, who have exploited a loophole Fine Gael refused to fix, by registering in Northern Ireland for the purpose of accessing mussel seed outside their home jurisdiction. Despite my attempts to amend this legislation my concerns were rejected by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil.

In the context of Brexit, there are fears that fishermen who fished in UK waters all their lives will no longer have access. Furthermore, because Lough Foyle is a disputed territory between Ireland and the UK, there are concerns among some fishermen that this area will be governed by two sets of fishing regulations when the UK leaves the EU.

Uncertainty over Brexit has dominated the fishing industry. Many local skippers had used up their annual quotas in the first three months of the year with the knock-on effect being considerably less business in local fish processing factories. The uncertainty over Brexit has also resulted in many fishermen postponing investment in new equipment, launching new products or hiring new staff.

MY SOLUTION:

- Fight for access to UK fishing grounds post Brexit.
- Pursue further increases in recreational bluefin tuna quotas to stimulate tourism activities.
- Recognise and protect our unique and culturally important inshore fisheries.
- Push for better regulation and management of Lough Foyle aquaculture activities.
- Ring-fence non-transferable fishing quotas for small-scale fishing.
- Protect income supports for fishermen/women and farmers.

Farming

Agri-food is one of the most exposed sectors on both sides of the border and many farmers are afraid of losing access to the UK – their largest export market. The

lingering EU-Mercosur Deal that Fine Gael has been pushing will further reduce farm incomes by bringing in cheaper Brazilian beef. Reforming CAP payments for farmers will be instrumental in protecting farm incomes which is why I have been campaigning with MEP Luke 'Ming' Flanagan for changes that will bring in additional funding for farmers in Donegal.

MY SOLUTION:

- Support the flattening of CAP payments which will see €17m in additional funding coming to over 7000 Donegal farmers.
- End the Mercosur Deal which would reduce incomes for family farms in Donegal.
- Introduce a revised suckler scheme as outlined by the Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association in their proposals.

Islands

Policy regarding offshore islands is largely absent from Fine Gael and other political parties. Greater focus on policy for the sustainable development of islands off Ireland's coast is urgently needed. Islands and their communities continue to be at risk due to the lack of sustainable policies regarding their culture and traditions. Everything possible must be done to protect the livelihoods of island communities in Donegal and across the country.

MY SOLUTION:

- Amend legislation preventing European fishermen from exploiting our dwindling fish resources.
- Protect island communities and islanders' livelihoods. Implement my Dáil motion protecting island rights to traditional seaweed harvesting
- Implement the 2014 Dáil Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine Report on Promoting Sustainable Rural, Coastal and Island Communities.

Social Welfare & Employment Rights

Donegal has one of the highest percentage rates of dependency on social welfare in the country. Social welfare is vitally important to people in Donegal, whether they are in a low-paid job or are unemployed. Fine Gael has refused to restore social welfare rates to pre-2012 levels and continues to pay private companies, like JobPath, to deal with people who are out of work.

Social welfare plays a huge role in allowing people to have a decent standard of living, particularly families and children. Yet, poverty rates are still persistently high. I believe we need to apply a minimum standard of living to all social welfare rates so people can live with dignity and meet all their essential needs. For those in work, the minimum wage needs to be increased, as many working families continue to struggle to get by.

MY SOLUTION:

- Return all Social Welfare rates to 2012 levels, allowing for increase in inflation.
- End JobPath and Fine Gael's continued privatisation of social welfare services.
- Return Contributory Pension rates and entitlements to pre-2012 levels to target pension poverty. Stop the state pension age increasing from 66 to 67.
- Remove barriers to social welfare payments facing seasonal workers in Donegal.
- Increase the Working Family Payment and other supports for working families.
- Protect workers' rights, including union recognition by employers and visits to workplaces.
- End the discrimination of the gender pay gap
- Increase the National Minimum Wage, taking into account the income needs and potential ways of addressing income inadequacy.
- Increase supports for lone parents in low-paid work and tackle child poverty rates.
- Legislate to increase workers' rights.
- Support the 'Minimum Essential Standard of Living' project by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, which seeks to benchmark social welfare rates to reflect inflation and ensure an adequate income for those in and out of employment.

Social Inclusion

We all believe that people should be treated fairly and have a decent standard of living. We should all have access to the services we need; have a good income, good housing, a good education, good health. We should be able to participate in our community and in community activities. We should have meaningful and well-paid jobs.

This is not the case anywhere in Ireland and particularly not in Donegal. People are pushed to the margins by the policies of this government and by every government led by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Government policy favours those who are already well off and who are already privileged. Ordinary decent people have been left out and excluded because of where they were born; the education they were able to get; their ethnic group; their gender; whether they have a disability; the colour of their skin; their religious community; by who they choose to love. In short, everyone and anyone can be excluded in some way or another, but some are excluded more than others.

It doesn't have to be that way. I have spent my life and my political career as Donegal's independent TD and before that as a councillor fighting for the rights of people who have been left out, and for Donegal as a county because it has been left out. I believe in a Donegal, an Ireland, where people are given an equal chance and where government policy is designed to help people and not to discriminate against them.

I will continue to stand for all people who find themselves marginalised within our country. Diversity has always been our strength in Donegal and when everyone can participate fully, we are all richer for it. In the same way, we will have a stronger country when Donegal as a county is no longer forgotten and our voice is heard.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is on the rise in Ireland, with femicide rates increasing every year. It is important to recognise that rural isolation tends to be a significant contributing factor in the existence and persistence of domestic violence.

MY SOLUTION:

- Support local-led charities and services that provide help to victims of domestic abuse, with a particular focus on isolated areas in Donegal.
- Ensure funding for small domestic violence support teams covering a large rural area and for the roll-out of a fully funded outreach programme for Donegal.
- Implement the Istanbul Convention on preventing violence against women, with a focus on prevention, protection and prosecution.

Rural isolation & mental health

Loneliness and social isolation in particular can have a major impact on a person's life and well-being, particularly for older people. The challenge of dealing with loneliness is particularly acute in rural areas.

There are more than 15,800 people over 65 living in Donegal. More than 6,500 are living alone. We must address the rural isolation challenge head on.

More cohesive and tight-knit communities do better to reduce isolation. However, under Fine Gael, funding for projects that helped combat loneliness and rural isolation has been reduced over the years and I want to see that funding restored.

MY SOLUTION:

- Address needs of an ageing population, such as loneliness, transport and housing.
- Improve efficiency in housing to meet special housing needs, i.e. Travellers, older people and people with disabilities.
- Provide multi-annual ring-fenced funding for community-led projects that focus on ending rural isolation and loneliness.
- Maintain mental health supports for older people and ensure access to isolated areas.

Community Services

Funding for community-led projects servicing a particular local need (ie: domestic violence services and respite care) have been under attack by Fine Gael since they came to power. I have visited many community projects - it is clear that the community-led model works. However, funding is constantly running out and projects are constantly under threat of closure despite the services being value for money.

MY SOLUTION

- Increase and ring-fence funding for community-led projects that focus on particular local needs, such as services for people affected by domestic violence and families in need of respite care.
- Invest in a multi-annual funding plan so community projects can plan ahead and meet challenges head on.

Combating Racism

Sadly, racism exists and has existed in Donegal for many years. Initially it was largely directed at members of the Traveller community. However, with people from different cultures and diverse religions moving here for work, education, as refugees

and asylum seekers, or simply because they find Donegal a nice place to live, the targets of racism have widened.

We must show solidarity with all members of our communities, our county and our country. Racism and discrimination have no place in our society. We are, all of us, in this together.

I believe that Donegal must practice social inclusion by taking positive steps to remove barriers to active participation in all areas of life including education, employment, access to services, social and cultural activities and childcare. We need strategies, practices and behaviour that actively promote and facilitate participation and inclusion.

MY SOLUTION:

- End the use of the private sector in Direct Provision centres and work towards ending Direct Provision altogether.
- Implement the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination.
- Adopt a new National Action Plan Against Racism. The last action plan ran from 2005 to 2008.
- Revive the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI).
- Enact legislation to target online hate abuse and provide a mechanism whereby hate speech committed by politicians can be effectively investigated and prosecuted.
- Provide an Inclusion Plan for newcomers to Irish society, allocating sufficient resources for the provision of language support teachers in the education system.

Rural Disability

One of my proudest moments as a TD was when my Dáil motion on the Right to a Personal Assistance Service for people with disabilities was passed unanimously by all parties and none. It follows much work done by the Independent Living Movement of Ireland, who advocate for independent living for people with disabilities. A fully funded service like this would mean people with disabilities can live independent lives enabling them to work, socialise and live as equals in society. This would help remove the various barriers that persist in rural areas such as those in Donegal.

MY SOLUTION:

- Establish a fully funded Personal Assistance Service for independent living.
- Separate 'home help' from personal assistance by moving the PA service to the Department of Social Welfare.
- Implement fully the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Support participation in education, training and employment programmes.
- Restore the Rehabilitative Training allowance cut by Fine Gael and expand

- supports to remove barriers to employment.
- Roll out wheelchair accessible bus routes in and out of Donegal.

Childcare

I support the provision of affordable childcare before and after school. Statistics from the OECD show that childcare in Ireland costs 30% of net household income, which is the second highest level in the EU. Despite a number of taxpayer-funded initiatives in recent years, under Fine Gael's watch, childcare costs have continued to rise while childcare sector wages have remained low. A dedicated and well-funded agency should streamline childcare policy and support various types of childcare appropriate for children of different ages. Staff pay in the sector is unacceptably low with the average rate of pay at just €11.18 per hour - below the living wage of €12.30.

MY SOLUTION:

- Distinguish between the needs of pre-school and school age children.
- Provide supports for small businesses to address specific childcare needs for families in small communities.
- Remove barriers to employment caused by high childcare costs, particularly for lone parents whose poverty rate more than doubled between 2012 and 2017, from one in 11 to one in five. Merge the existing seven state agencies regulating childcare services into one Childcare Agency.
- I believe in fair pay for childcare workers and I fully support SIPTU's 'The Big Start' for fair pay in the sector.

An Gaeltacht

Tá ceann de na ceantracha Gaeltachta is mó sa tír i nDún na nGall. Meastar go bhfuil an Ghaeltacht ag “pointe claochlaithe,” nach mbeadh sí inmharthana mar aonad teangeolaíochta.

Ó 2008, baineadh €18 milliún de bhuiséad Údarás na Gaeltachta.

I 2011, chuir Fine Gael deireadh le toghcháin do Bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta, ag maíomh go sábhálfadh siad níos lú ná €1 milliún.

Tá an pobal, a bhfuil an teanga ag brath air le fanacht beo, faoi ionsaí ag easpa infheistíochta san infrastructúr, druid áiseanna pobail agus imirce daoine óga as an cheantar.

Bunaíodh Coistí Pleanála Teanga in achan pharóiste Gaeltachta.

Donegal has one of the largest Gaeltacht areas in the country. The Gaeltacht is now considered to be at the “tipping point,” where it could very soon be unsustainable as a linguistic unit.

Since 2008, Údarás na Gaeltachta’s budget has been stripped of €18 million.

In 2011, Fine Gael ended direct elections to the Board of Údarás na Gaeltachta, claiming a saving of less than €1 million.

The community, which language retention depends on, has been ravaged by lack of infrastructural investment, closure of existing facilities and a massive migration of young people from the area.

Language Planning Committees have been set up in all Gaeltacht parishes.

Taxation

The billionaire club in Ireland is growing, fostered by policies favouring the wealthy led by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. There are now 17 billionaires in Ireland equating to 3.5 per 1 million residents – the fifth-highest ratio in the world.

Wealth inequality is growing steadily too, with the top 10% owning more than half of all the net wealth in Ireland at 53.8%.

To facilitate the solutions, I've proposed in this manifesto I want to reform our tax system so that those who have more - assets, money, investments - pay more. If it's fair it won't hurt anyone, and we should not fear targeting multinationals or wealthy individuals for their fair share. I have used much of the measures called for by Social Justice Ireland who have done huge amounts of in-depth research on tax reform. There are numerous ways to tax wealth, and I have detailed two examples of how this would look. It is not an extensive list of what could be done to raise revenue.

Tax Avoidance

Too many firms get away with paying low effective rates or availing of special subsidies or tax holidays. Among the top 100 corporate taxpayers eight had a 0% or less rate, five paid between 0% and 1%, one paid between 1% and 5%. It is clear that a small number of very large firms are at the core of the tax adequacy issues in this sector. In one sweep we could implement a national social housing place just by collecting what we are owed from Apple - €14b.

MY PROPOSAL:

- Introduce an effective corporation tax rate of 6%. This would yield in excess of €1 billion a year (as costed by Social Justice Ireland)

Wealth Tax

Wealth generates privilege, status and opportunity that is not available to everyone else and therefore must be taxed. How else are we to tackle the growing epidemic of wealth inequality affecting the modern world?

MY PROPOSAL:

- One proposal would be to bring in a 0.5% wealth tax on the 1% of the State's highest earners, which it's estimated could add approximately €2 billion a year to the Irish economy.