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Date: 12 February 1993

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REPUBLIC OF IRELAND: TAOISEACH'S NOMINEES TO THE SEANAD

Summary

1. Taoiseach announces his 11 nominees. Seven seats go to Fianna Fail and 4 to Labour. Gordon Wilson's appointment the only surprise.

Detail

2. The Taoiseach announced his eleven nominees to the Seanad on 10 February. The seven new Fianna Fail Senators are Gordon Wilson, father of Marie Wilson who was murdered by the IRA at Enniskillen in 1987; G V Wright, outgoing leader of the House; Dr Brian Hillery, who lost his seat in the Dail at the last election (and who, incidentally, has just agreed to go on a Sponsored Visit before the end of March); Billy Kelleher, a 25 year old farmer who narrowly failed to win a seat at the election; Marian McGennis, a Dublin Councillor who is expected to seek a Dail seat at the next election; Sean Byrne, an outgoing Senator who is also expected to stand for the Dail next time round; and Brian Crowley, son of a former Fianna Fail Deputy and confined to a wheelchair. Three of the Labour Party nominees are people expected to be strong candidates for Dail seats at the next election; Jack Wall, an electrician from Co Kildare; Bill Cashin, a craftsman with the Southern Health Board; and Jim Townsend, a farmer from Carlow. The fourth nominee, Pat Magner, a businesswoman from Cork, has been a member of the Seanad on two previous occasions and has been honorary National Organiser of the Labour Party for several years.

Comment

3. Gordon Wilson's appointment is the only real surprise and has been welcomed here; an editorial in the Irish Times said it was a "demonstration of what a Taoiseach can do when he has

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imagination, a solid majority or a desire to please". (They did not say which applied in Mr Reynolds' case). With the exception of Mr Wilson and of Brian Crowley (whose appointment will highlight the total lack of facilities for disabled people in Leinster House) the other appointments all appear to have been made, as usual, with an eye to electoral considerations. The fact that only one of the eleven was a woman - despite the Government's commitment to increasing women's representation in public life - has been much criticized (although no one was really surprised). But Mary Flaherty TD told us over dinner last night that the Taoiseach had originally not planned to appoint any women at all and had only changed his mind at the last moment (much to the chagrin of his original candidate) after the Government's record on promoting opportunities for women was roundly criticized - most effectively by Mary Harney TD - during the debate earlier the same day on the election of the Leas Ceann Comhairle or Deputy Speaker.

(Signed)

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