

Howlin on minister's taxi furore: It's hard to be right

BRENDAN Howlin rebuked journalists who asked him about junior minister Dara Murphy's call to gardaí to take him on a 200km trip to the airport.

He added: 'In politics it's hard to be right.'

Mr Murphy has denied he balked at the €350 taxi fare.

While Government protocols say ministers should attempt to privately source transport for official duties, but can rely on the gardaí in an emergency, Mr Murphy is understood to be the only minister to avail of the 2012 directive.

However, yesterday Mr Howlin, the minister responsible for Government spending, indicated that his junior colleague might have been allowed to claim for the taxi trip.

The Minister for Public Expendi-

By **Senan Molony**
Political Editor

ture told reporters: 'Had he claimed the taxi fare of €350 you would be asking me about that.'

Mr Murphy has made it clear he will not be claiming mileage for the trip undertaken by two Mitchelstown-based gardaí.

Mr Howlin's defence of Mr Murphy came after two Cabinet and party colleagues - Tánaiste and Labour leader Joan Burton and Communications Minister Alex White - declared at the weekend that Mr Murphy's actions had been an 'inappropriate' use of Garda resources.

But Mr Howlin went on to suggest that there could have been a cost to Ireland if Mr Murphy had missed ministerial engagements in Brussels the following

day. 'Had he not attended the European Council meeting dealing with refugees, you'd be asking about that,' he lectured. 'So in politics it's hard to be right.'

Mr Murphy is declining to comment further on the affair, having offered a qualified apology in a Sunday radio interview with RTÉ, saying he regretted it, if it could be seen as inappropriate, but stressed extenuating circumstances. Taxi driver Gerdy Murphy from Mitchelstown has insisted the minister declined his €350 fare offer on cost grounds, a version Mr Murphy disputes.

Mr Murphy was narrowly selected as Fine Gael's sole general election candidate in Cork North Central at a convention on Monday night. He edged out Senator Colm Burke for the nomination by 188 votes to 172.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Can parenting get easier as they grow up? If only it did...

IT gets easier as they get older'. I cannot begin to tell you how often I heard that when my children were very young. Whenever I sighed with exasperation, worry or fury, someone would invariably pat me on the back and offer those words in solace and in solidarity.

They were right: it does get somewhat easier as they get older. My boys are now ten, seven and four, each one a little man with character, opinions and wilful determination. They have already spread themselves across the world, marking out their territory in a unique way.

Our eldest is a rock of sense, a sensitive child who cares deeply about life, love and the surrounding world. Despite their rows, he dotes on his brothers. He is our worrier, someone who needs constant reassurance that the things which matter will endure.

Our middle boy is a free spirit, a child who never ceases to soar with the angels. When we are down, he lifts us up with laughter and levity. His worries are always short-lived, a small ripple in an ocean of calm.

And then there is our four-year-old, a force of nature that swirls through the house like a typhoon. When we want to know where he is we simply follow his trail of devastation. 'I'll clean it up later!' he exclaims but later never comes.

That, however, is only half the picture. If you can get past the mounds of Lego, the disembowelled drawers and wanton disregard for order, you will discover a little boy with a huge heart. If his brothers adore him, it is because they are charmed by his precious little smile, his affectionate and loving soul.

Life is easier now because they are all friends who play together, who have common interests and whose sense of belonging is rock solid. They fight and often declare their undying enmity for each other, but that rarely lasts beyond the moment. Tears soon give way to chuckles and then it's back to business as usual.

Our eldest regularly spars with his seven-year-old brother. Yet, whenever they are separated for a night, there are always wet eyes. Neither can sleep easy without the other.

The eldest had gone to visit his grandparents and his brother sat with us at the table. With these words, he broke the silence: 'I will really miss him. He is my best friend and I love him.' Not for the first time, I found it hard to restrain my tears.

Each night as they settle down, they openly express that love for each other before nodding off. It is a lovely

thing to hear, a lovely thing for brothers so young to know that love and to have such a sense of loyalty. My earnest wish, as I often tell them, is that they shall have it for life.

Life is easier because they now look to each other instead of their parents. When they are in difficulty they call first on their brothers. When they have a question about their favourite characters or pastime, it is no longer to us that they come.

All of this is beautiful because we know that so long as they have each other, they shall not be alone. So many children are destroyed by loneliness, devastated simply because they are without a friend. Thanks to their strong bond, the curse of loneliness is not something with which my children have had to contend.

As an only child, I look at my boys with a certain degree of envy. I didn't feel it at the time, but as I watch them now I realise that I would have loved what they have. It is, however, more than enough to see them live as though what they possess is the norm. It is easier and yet I must confess that, at another level, it is getting harder.

THAT is because there is a part of me that doesn't want them to grow up. There is something deep down which rebels against their inevitable drive towards the front door.

As I said to a friend the other day, I don't know where I would be without them or their mother. They have shown me the meaning of life, of love and loyalty, of joy and belonging. Without knowing it, they have taken me on a journey of the heart.

The more dependent they are on one another, the less reliant they are on their parents. Without that transition, they would never have fostered the deep friendship they now enjoy. They would never know the support and strength that is the gift of good siblings.

I am so proud they have found in each other something so precious. Like all fathers, I long for each of them to move through life knowing they are not alone. My deep hope is that they shall never lose this pearl of great price.

And then I will have to learn to be without them, even if I know they will always have one another.

In the end, that is why it might be more honest to say: 'It gets harder as they get older.'

For there is nothing easy in glancing at that empty table and hearing a faint echo of his lovely words: 'I will really miss you. You are my best friends and I will always love you.'

—mark.dooley@daily@mail.ie—

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