

# SF TD quits over party support for abortion

A SINN FÉIN TD has quit the party over its stance on abortion – but a second high-ranking pro-life member looks set to stay on.

Offaly TD Carol Nolan was already serving a three-month suspension for voting against the legislation to allow last month's abortion referendum to be held.

Her departure came after the weekend ard fheis in Belfast which liberalised Sinn Féin's abortion policy, meaning its TDs will have to vote for Health Minister Simon Harris's upcoming legislation to give effect to the referendum repeal vote.

'I do not want to have any hand, act or part in bringing

By **Senan Molony**  
Political Editor

about the end to the life of an unborn child, the most vulnerable in our society,' Ms Nolan said in a statement. 'It is not for politicians or society, in general, to decide who lives or dies. Every life is precious and every child deserves the chance to live. I don't believe that abortion is the solution to any crisis. How can it be when it takes the right to life away from the unborn? I cannot and will not support abortion and for that reason I have made a decision to leave Sinn Féin.'

The party's Meath West TD, Peadar Tóibín, who is also

opposed to abortion, was not available for comment.

Ms Nolan is the second Oireachtas member to quit the party this year, after Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh resigned his seat, complaining about internal politics.

Mr Tóibín, who held a Vote No event with Ms Nolan at the GPO in Dublin during the campaign, has not been suspended.

Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald yesterday expressed regret at the 'disappointing but not surprising' departure.

However, she added: 'The Sinn Féin Ard Fheis has democratically agreed the party's position to support the forthcoming legislation.'



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# Dr Mark Dooley



**MORAL MATTERS**

## Rugged reality in the Gaeltacht and not a mobile phone in sight

**I**T was the quietness, the clean air and the rugged landscape that impressed me most. We had travelled to Carna in Co. Galway, where our eldest is attending Irish college. He departed for the Gaeltacht nearly three weeks ago and, finally, we were reunited in the heart of Connemara.

Carna is the essence of old Ireland. Think of John Ford's classic movie *The Quiet Man*, where rugged rock protrudes from every glen and valley, and you will have an idea of what I mean. It is, quite literally, the 'wild Atlantic way' – a place virtually untouched by technology and the ways of our modern world.

There is a gentleness to the place and its people, a serenity that is almost audible in the Atlantic air. It could well be described as remote, but that would be to sell it short. No, Carna and the surrounding countryside is best described as an idyll unspoilt by the ravages of a world addicted to speed, stress and strain.

Each summer, hundreds of secondary school children are bussed to Carna, not only to improve their Irish, but to savour life in the Gaeltacht. For many of them, it is difficult to adapt. From their settled city lives – complete with gadgets, phones and devices – they are suddenly immersed in the world of their forebears.

All phones are confiscated, and no gadgets are allowed. From the moment they arrive, they are compelled to speak Irish. Each day is divided between the college, their 'teach', and the evening céili.

It is like a total reprogramming of the entire person. Gone is the spectral sphere of devices and screens, only to be replaced by a real and rugged world where they are put firmly in touch with their history and heritage. In just over two weeks, our son had learned more Irish than he had in his entire schooling to date.

What's more, he and his friends had learned to live without those things around which their lives had so recently revolved. Social media had given way to real conversation; electronic games were replaced by true sport.

And, as we soon found out, they had discovered the sheer joy of dance and song. From the moment

our son and his friend entered our car, they sang their way around Connemara.

Before long, we were all at it. Never did I think that I'd be driving the Wild Atlantic Way to the sound of our children belting it out as Gaeilge.

And yet, there we were enjoying every second, admiring the sensational scenery while trying to avoid the many animals with whom we shared the road. Cattle, sheep and the occasional billy goat took to the roads as though they were made specifically for them.

When I plucked up the courage to overtake them, they gave me a look of such contempt that I knew it was me and not them who was the interloper.

That night, our son was asked to sing at the Vigil Mass. He chose *The Prayer*, a song made popular by Andrea Bocelli and Celine Dion. And so, in a beautiful little church in the heart of the Gaeltacht, we listened to these tender words:

*Let this be our prayer  
As we go our way  
Lead us to a place  
Guide us with your grace  
To a place where we'll be safe.*

The following morning, as we sat overlooking the grey Atlantic, a little girl joined us with her mother for breakfast.

Her brother is also studying at the nearby Irish college. 'I don't like the city anymore,' she said, 'there is just too much going on.'

**S**ITTING in a place where the pace of life is so much slower, healthier and less frenetic, it was easy to agree with her. It is a world in which life is richly lived, where people are not subject to the tyranny of time, and where the things that really matter are valued and cherished. Learning Irish is a vital component of our son's course, but so, too, is learning how to value a way of life from which everyone could benefit.

We drove from Connemara with tears in our eyes. Our middle son summed it up by saying: 'Without a family member we're just not complete'. Our eldest will be back on Sunday but leaving him behind was heartbreaking.

Guided by grace, we eventually arrived to that place where we feel safe. Back in Carna, our son was already jiving at the céili.

—mark.dooley@daily@mail.ie—