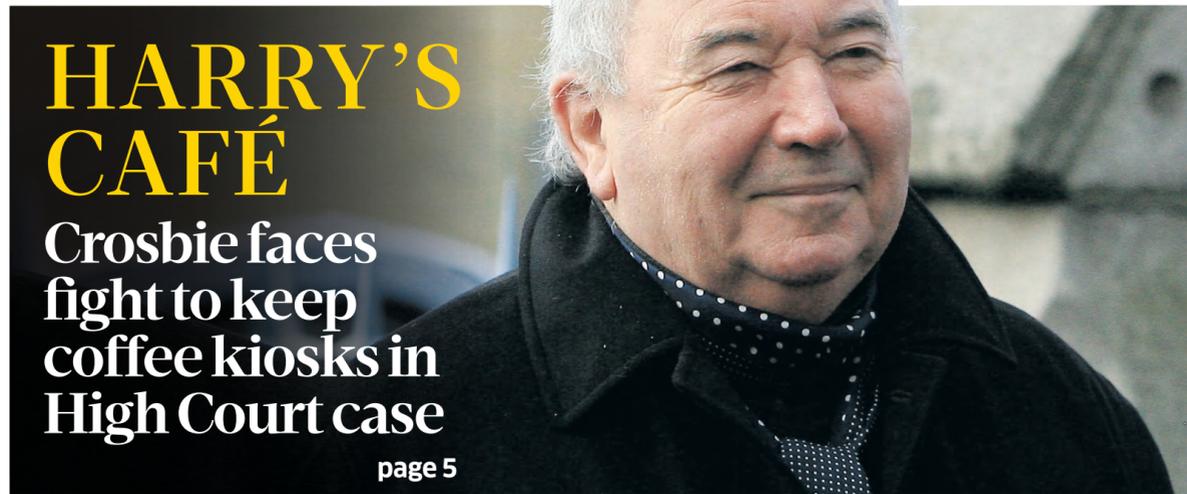


The Sunday Business Post

February 10-11, 2019

businesspost.ie

Price £2.00



HARRY'S CAFÉ

Crosbie faces fight to keep coffee kiosks in High Court case

page 5

Labour leader pushes government access for Big Tobacco firms

- Howlin and FG's Noone among politicians canvassed by industry
- Cigarette giants anxious to influence anti-smoking initiatives

BY BARRY J WHYTE

Leading tobacco firms have ramped up their lobbying of senior politicians across the political spectrum, recently convincing Labour Party leader Brendan Howlin to call on the government to meet them to discuss anti-smoking policies. Last month, two giant cigarette-makers, Japan Tobacco and Imperial Brands, lobbied Howlin as part of their goal

to loosen Ireland's practice of not meeting with tobacco companies, a policy that is endorsed by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Howlin – who introduced the Regulation of Lobbying Act in 2015 – received a briefing note from his political director on January 14, outlining how the two companies felt “prejudiced” against by the “blank” refusal of government officials and ministers to

meet with them. They argued that their input could help to save money by avoiding minor regulatory errors. On January 21, a week after the meeting, Howlin wrote to Minister for Finance Pascal Donohoe. In his email, he pointed out that “while Labour is no supporter of that industry, I am bringing it to your attention in your capacity as head of the civil service, to ask whether you think it is appropriate

for your officials to blankly refuse to meet with industries that they are regulating, even to discuss the technical details of that regulation”. Howlin added: “Lobbying and meetings with officials is a normal part of any democratic political system. The whole point of the Regulation of Lobbying Act is to make sure those meetings are open and transparent, to prevent



SET IN STONE? Michael Murray and Ian Guider on CRH

page 15

Pigsback sale to English firm nets €25 million

BY COLETTE SEXTON

Last week's sale of Irish firm Pigsback.com to an English travel group was worth an estimated €25 million.

The deal is one of the largest transactions by any Irish e-commerce firm so far this year.

Empathy Marketing, which runs Pigsback.com, was sold to British-based online travel deals company Secret Escapes Group.

Empathy Marketing has grown sales by more than 200 per cent since 2016. It had revenues of €5.7 million two years ago, with operating profits of €1 million.

Full story: page 3

Crackdown on state pensions nets €15 million for exchequer

BY MICHAEL BRENNAN
POLITICAL EDITOR

Thousands of partners of state pensioners have had their pensions reduced or cut off completely as part of a new crackdown which has brought in €15 million.

Social welfare inspectors are targeting up to 66,000 people – mainly women – who get a partial pension while their partner gets a full state contributory pension.

They are checking tax records, bank interest payments and property registration databases to see if these failed to declare any extra income in their original pension means test.

Briefing documents ob-

tained from the Department of Social Protection under the Freedom of Information Act show that up to 6,000 reviews were carried out last year on people getting partial pensions.

The crackdown has brought in €15.7 million so far, with what the department calls ‘adult dependents’ having their half-pensions reduced or cut off completely.

“The majority of savings (75 per cent) arise where the means of the adult dependent are deemed to be over the income limit for payment,” the department documents stated.

Fianna Fáil social welfare spokesman Willie O’Dea said he had dealt with people who

had lost their means-tested pension due to the reviews.

“I think it’s wrong. There has been a hardening of the social welfare system under this government,” he said.

The briefing documents state that “Revenue data” has been used to identify people on partial pensions “whose annual earnings exceed the means limits”.

O’Dea said the reviews were reducing the pensions of spouses and partners who had savings of €30,000 or €40,000 in their bank accounts.

“All the computer systems are talking to each other. There’s no element of discretion,” he said.

to page 2

The UUP

At a low ebb or in terminal decline?

New columnist Deirdre Heenan

page 19

BREXIT ROAD TRIP

A border community on the edge

Sligo Enniskillen

pages 10-11

Vaping dilemma

Just how safe is it?

Post Plus, page 1-3



TOM MCGURK: Could Irish America save the backstop?

page 18

LOWEST MORTGAGE RATES

in town

On our 1 & 3 year Loan to Value Fixed Rates

KBC
The bank of you

☎ | 1800 51 52 53

📍 | Pop into a hub

🗨 | Talk to your mortgage broker

WINNER
BEST MORTGAGE FOR SWITCHERS

bNkers+ NATIONAL CONSUMER AWARDS 2019

Source: bonkers.ie 07.02.19. Rates available to residential mortgages only. Lending criteria, underwriting, terms & conditions apply. Security and insurance required. Max loan amount will typically not exceed 3.5 times an individual's gross income. The maximum mortgage is 90% of the property value. KBC Bank Ireland plc is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.

WARNING: IF YOU DO NOT KEEP UP YOUR REPAYMENTS YOU MAY LOSE YOUR HOME.

WARNING: YOU MAY HAVE TO PAY CHARGES IF YOU PAY OFF A FIXED RATE LOAN EARLY.

In this week's paper



NEWS

SUNDAY INTERVIEW

Ken Mealy, president of the Royal College of Surgeons
page 16



MAGAZINE

Pressure cooker

The truth about keeping an Irish restaurant in business
pages 10-14

POST PLUS

Liam Neeson

How Hollywood was horrified by a leading man's outburst
Profile, page 12



PROPERTY PLUS

Dream home in Monkstown

This Victorian residence might tempt one to go out and buy a lottery ticket
Cover story



Who will blink first in latest Brexit stand-off?

• Leo Varadkar's government is banking on Theresa May not allowing Britain to spiral into a no-deal Brexit. But with seven weeks to go, it's a risky game – as May could be waiting out the clock as well

BY MICHAEL BRENNAN
POLITICAL EDITOR

The government is continuing to rely on British prime minister Theresa May blinking before she pushes her country into a no-deal Brexit.

Government sources say there is no option but to continue with the strategy of insisting on the retention of the backstop – the guarantee there will be no hard border on the island when Britain leaves on March 29.

There has been no shift in



Leo Varadkar greets Theresa May at Farmleigh House on Friday night

Maxwells

the government's position after Taoiseach Leo Varadkar's round of meetings last week with May in the state-owned Farmleigh House in Dublin's Phoenix Park, European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker in Brussels and DUP leader Arlene Foster in Belfast. But with just seven weeks to go till the departure date,

the government's hope is that May will at least be forced to postpone it by asking the EU to extend the Article 50 exit process. Varadkar has repeatedly said that the British government can avoid a no-deal hard Brexit either by revoking its withdrawal notice under Article 50 of the EU Treaty or by seeking an extension to Article 50.

Dr Jennifer Cassidy, who lectures in politics at the University of Oxford, said British people were just as frustrated at the lack of progress as Irish people were. "People keep expressing the word 'shame'. They're ashamed of Westminster,

just blindly going about it. The more the government ignore what the people are saying, the more frustrated people are getting," she said.

Cassidy said she believed that May's strategy was to wait out the clock till March 29. "If she waits out the clock and there's a no-deal, then they leave and that's it. Her main priority for better or worse is arriving at that March 29 deadline. She's not going to be the prime minister who failed to deliver the referendum mandate," she said.

May has been telling colleagues that she wants to keep the Conservative Party

together and does not want to be remembered like former British prime minister Ramsay MacDonald. He split his Labour party when he went into a national government with the Tories during the Great Depression in 1931 and ended up being expelled from Labour.

Green Party Belgian MEP Philippe Lamberts said that May and British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn were playing a "mirror game" because they were trying to keep their parties united on Brexit.

"Jeremy Corbyn is performing a game that looks very like the game of Theresa May. I'm a Brexiteer, but I want Brexit to embarrass the Tories. I want to keep the unity of my party while dividing the Tories." And that's the exact mirror game of Theresa May," he said.

Lamberts, a member of the European Parliament's Brexit steering group, said this was preventing any coalition of Conservative and Labour MPs from uniting on a soft Brexit.

He said there was no question of the EU dropping its support for the Irish backstop because that could open a 500-kilometre "back door" to the EU single market on the Irish border.

"What the hard Brexiteers are really asking us is to renounce the single market. Goods produced with standards that do not match those of the EU will freely enter the EU market. Do they think we are stupid enough to allow that to happen?"

State auditor contradicts Varadkar over claim on Children's Hospital costs

• Chief procurement officer Paul Quinn under scrutiny in debacle over spiralling costs for National Children's Hospital

BY HUGH O'CONNELL
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

The state's auditor has cast doubt over Taoiseach Leo Varadkar's claim that a senior civil servant on the National Children's Hospital board could not have raised concerns about cost overruns with Minister for Finance Paschal Donohoe.

Comptroller and Auditor General Seamus McCarthy confirmed last week his understanding that a Department of Finance circular, which obliges officials on non-commercial state boards to report to the relevant Minister "where a matter of serious concern arises", did apply in the case of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB).

Paul Quinn, the state's chief procurement officer, has come under scrutiny in the debacle over the hospital's spiralling costs, after it emerged he was a member of the board responsible for the hospital project but did not alert Donohoe to the escalating overrun.

Quinn is also facing questions over his failure to disclose his membership of the NPHDB to the Public Accounts Committee last month.

In the Dáil last week, Varadkar indicated that Quinn would not have had responsibility to report the matter to Donohoe.

"If somebody is on a board, his or her fiduciary and legal responsibilities are to that board and the correct line of accountability is from the chairman of that board to the line minister, not individual board members acting on their own part," he said.

Labour health spokesman Alan Kelly said it was now "quite obvious" from what the C&G said that the Quinn was subject to the circular.

"So what the Taoiseach said in the Dáil is bogus and wrong, and he needs to correct that," said Kelly.

"Also, the Minister for Public Expenditure needs to explain why the most senior procurement officer who was sitting on the board wasn't reporting very serious issues to his secretary general and to him."

Quinn wrote to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) last month to outline the Office of Government Procurement's "limited role" in procurement arrangements for the hospital.

He wrote that the NPHDB engaged the government's contacts committee for con-

struction to seek a derogation from normal state contract rules as it was such a large project.

"Members of the board made two formal presentations during the course of the development of their procurement strategy, and a number of meetings with individual members of the committee to discuss detailed aspects of the strategy and contract were also held," Quinn wrote, adding that a derogation did not approve the strategy but merely acknowledged that the project required a different approach.

However, he did not disclose in the letter to PAC that he is also a member of the NPHDB.

PAC chairman Seán Fleming said in committee: "There is a clear conflict of interest between the two positions, given the derogation, his being a member of the board and his being on both sides of that debate. What I find more disturbing is that he did not inform this committee of this. He should have at least highlighted it."

Quinn has said he is willing to come before the committee, where he is likely to face questions over why he did not inform Donohoe or Department of Finance officials of the escalating overruns with the hospital project prior to them finding out last November.

Donohoe has maintained he was not aware of the project overrun until November.



TransferMate
GLOBAL PAYMENTS

HELPING BUSINESSES NAVIGATE BREXIT



TransferMate are a global B2B platform helping importers & exporters across the globe to send and receive international business payments faster and at a lower cost.

Save your business money by speaking with our team today.

Contact our team:
T: 01 887 28 20
E: currency@transfermate.com
www.transfermate.com/payments

Interpay Ltd trading as TransferMate is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland

Labour leader Howlin pushes government access for Big Tobacco

from page 1

undue or unknown influence on public policy from any business or group. As long as the provisions of the law are being adhered to, there is no reason why officials should refuse to meet with any lobbyist."

However, the Irish government adheres to WHO tobacco control guidelines which recommend that countries should protect their tobacco policies from "commercial and other vested interests", and Irish ministers generally decline to take meetings with tobacco lobbyists.

The ramping-up of the tobacco industry's efforts to get access to the policy-making process comes in parallel with a major push by its lobbyists to have vaping and e-cigarettes included as part of Ireland's anti-smoking policy.

At the moment, the HSE does not advocate the use of e-cigarettes or vaping in its Tobacco Free Ireland policy.

The organisation says that a Health Information and Quality Authority (Hiqa) evaluation had led them to advise the minister that e-cigarettes "effectiveness as a smoking cessation aid was uncertain", and that "there are also concerns that the social normalisation

of e-cigarettes may lead to new use by people who have never smoked, later migration to tobacco cigarettes, long-term nicotine dependency, and other potential and as yet unknown harms".

However, lobbying filings for the last three years show that several major international tobacco companies have launched extensive lobbying campaigns on vaping, sending hundreds of emails to and holding dozens of meetings with Irish TDs, senators and MEPs, in which they insist on the health benefits of their vaping products.

The campaigns have included direct lobbying by Japan Tobacco International, Philip Morris, Imperial Tobacco and British American Tobacco, as well as campaigns by local lobbying organisations which count those companies among their members, including the Irish Tobacco Manufacturers' Advisory Committee and Vape Business Ireland.

Some politicians have been lobbied several times by tobacco companies, including Fine Gael senator Catherine Noone, who has met with representatives of PJ Carroll three times and, on one occasion, received an email of



thanks for her public comments on vaping.

Noone has also met with lobbyists for Philip Morris, has taken a phone call from Japan Tobacco International, and met with representatives of Vape Business Ireland.

She is not alone. Her party colleague Noel Rock has also met with PJ Carroll and had a phone conversation with Japan Tobacco. Their fellow Fine Gaelers Bernard Durkan, Colm Burke and Jerry Buttiner have also met or had phone calls with tobacco companies.

Independent TD Kevin 'Boxer' Moran and John Paul Phelan held meetings with Philip Morris before being appointed as junior ministers, the lobbying filings show. Fianna Fail TDs Bobby Aylward (Carlow-Kilkenny) and Mary Butler (Waterford) have also met with the controversial

company.

When contacted by The Sunday Business Post, Noone said: "Since my election to the Seanad, I have consistently advocated in the area of public health. I have engaged with all sides of the argument on many public health issues. It is part of my job as a public representative to actively seek out as much information as possible on any issue before arriving at a decision."

"In recent weeks, I have tried to begin a conversation. My sole interest is in reducing the amount of people smoking in this country. My priority is health and exploring all measures that can improve people's health.

Rock, when contacted, said: "As a TD, I meet with many groups who request meetings. I believe it's worthwhile to approach things with an open mind, especially new things like this."

"While e-cigarettes are not my cup of tea, and the evidence is neither long-term or decisive, I see no harm in commissioning further research... and exploring the effectiveness of these tools in the ongoing push to cut smoking rates and incidences of associated illnesses."

See Post Plus, cover story

Crackdown on pensions nets the exchequer €15m

from page 1

Spouses and partners of a person on a state contributory pension can get a maximum pension of €218 per week. They have to pass a means test by showing their own income is under €100 per week. They can get a reduced pension if their income is between €100 and €310 per week. Savings, shares and property other than the family home are counted in the means test. Partners with their own income of more than €310 per week do not get any pension.

The department has been sending out letters to people getting partial pensions requiring them to confirm in writing that they have not any undeclared extra income. They are being told to retain any documentary evidence for four years because a sample of these cases will be "more intensively reviewed". A Department of Social Protection spokeswoman said it intended to carry out 6,500 of the reviews this year.

"The rate of payment may change (up or down) depending on the adult dependant's current means following their review," she said.

The crackdown will not affect people claiming the state contributory pension, as they have already established their entitlement to it through PRSI contributions. Around two

thirds of the state contributory pensions are going to men, which is why women are believed to make up most of the 66,000 'adult dependants' who are getting means-tested partial pensions.

The crackdown was sparked by a review of the state contributory pension in 2017 which found that the partial pensions paid to partners and spouses were the "highest risk category". The fraud and error rate among these pensions amounted to 13 per cent, versus 0.3 per cent for the state contributory pension.

Around €4 million of the €15.7 million generated by the review so far is due to the detection of pension payments to spouses and partners who had died. Social welfare inspectors found this was a particular problem for pension payments being made abroad "as delayed or non-notification of deaths was found to be the greatest risk". They checked the death records in the civil registration service here and the pension records held by the US and Australian authorities. That led to the termination of payments to 243 pensioners who were found to have died. The department is sending letters to all partners of people living abroad and are cutting off payments where there is no reply.

PostPlus

• MONEY • MARKETS • MOTORS

The Sunday
Business Post

February 10, 2019
businesspost.ie



Jill Kerby Our
new columnist
on how to solve
the nurses' strike
page 5



Long touted as the alternative to smoking, vaping is now coming under attack from observers who insist that it carries health dangers of its own. And all the while, Big Tobacco waits patiently in the wings

The vape of things to come?

By **Barry J Whyte**

You step outside, coffee or tea in your hand, and brace yourself against the cold. You pull out the small box, olive green these days, and flick the little tab of cellophane on the side with your fingernail and rip it all the way round the lid. The cellophane makes a tiny crinkling sound as you pull it off and scrunch it up and squeeze it between the holes in the grid of the outdoor ashtray. You flip the lid of the pack, listening for the soft snap of the cardboard. Your finger searches for the loosest one, you pull it out, and it makes a tiny sound like someone hushing you in a library.

You grip it between your lips and light it. A tiny flicker of heat and a flash of smell: slightly oily if you use a lighter, more sulphurous if it's matches. You close your eyes, probably, and inhale deeply.

That's it. That's all you need. By now, you've done the thing you want to do. More often than not, the cigarette is a disappointment. It

might burn your throat, or it actively sickens you, or you let the wind smoke it while you chat on the phone or to your smoking buddy.

Forget about sales taxes, plain packaging, patches, chewing gum or cold turkey. None of them can replace the ritual. It's that process – a comforting little rhythm and sequence **to page 2**



University College Dublin
Ireland's Global University

RANKED
No.1

IN IRELAND
FOR GRADUATE
EMPLOYABILITY
2018 & 2019



Discover graduates who
think bigger and go further.
www.ucd.ie/employability



Vape shops are springing up all over the country, but the actual impacts of the practice are, as yet, unknown

“Smoking a cigarette is like sticking a lump of coal in your mouth, lighting it up, and blowing out black, sooty smoke. But vaping is like sneezing into someone’s face, spraying a jet of tiny water droplets into their lungs”



Keith Flynn and Stuart Fagan, co-owners of Hale Vaping
Picture: Fergal Phillips

from page 1
of hand gestures ending in a satisfying sigh, practically a communion of prayer and incense-burning all in one – performed routinely at several points during the day and particularly at moments of high stress.

What’s the most addictive thing about smoking? It sure ain’t the nicotine.

If you’re trying to quit, that’s the thing you’ll miss: the moment. The physiological effect of nicotine is imperceptible, unlike drinking beer or a cup of coffee. It’s the psychological effect of the ritual, and the time of day it happens, that most smokers crave.

Into this gap has come vaping: a range of devices of varying sizes and designs that use a small heated coil to vaporise a liquid that contains nicotine and other flavourings. All the taste, none of the tar, and far closer to mimicking that ritual than anything that’s come before.

It ought to be a perfect cure for smoking, but the debate is more complicated than that.

For starters, many critics argue that the health benefits of vaping have been overstated, while others doubt the bonafides of Big Tobacco, which has come late to the game, but has managed to throw millions – maybe billions – into developing its own vast array of devices, liquids and non-burning tobacco products.

All of which means that, as the scale of the market balloons, vaping remains an unknown quantity.

Killian McGrath used to be a property developer and a smoker. When the economy crashed he, like plenty of other property developers, found himself with a great deal more spare time on his hands. That spare time was filled by smoking.

“I suppose after the collapse and when everything went to crap, I was on 50 or 60 a day. I could feel it. I knew they were doing damage. I kept saying: ‘I have to give these things up,’” he says.

Patches hadn’t done it for him, nor had chewing gum, but he bought his first e-cigarette in the summer of 2011 and took to it immediately. “I was getting the satisfaction of smoking without smoking,” he says. “The throat hit and the chest hit; blowing out the vapour without actually smoking.”

He hasn’t smoked since, and has become an evangelist for vaping. Before long, he turned it into a business.

It started when McGrath didn’t like the liquid he was buying – which he calls e-juice – and he wanted something with a stronger tobacco flavour. So he went out and researched the 13 main tobacco flavours used by the main cigarette companies, buying cigarettes to break them up, crush the tobacco flakes, burn them, smell them and try to identify their distinct aromas.

“Then I’d go to my 13 little drums [of liquid containing the basic tobacco flavours] and I would sniff each one and say, ‘There’s a bit of that in it,’ and I’d go down the line, with maybe three or four combinations of tobacco in each one,” he says, describing his process of experimenting.

“It was down to me to decipher which cigarette was inside, and how much of each. After I would break it down I’d test it and see how close I could get it by breaking down each flavour.”

Today he is the managing director and controlling shareholder of Liquid Solutions, a Waterford company that manufactures and sells liquids for vaping,

and he produces 200,000 bottles of the stuff every month.

He’s not alone. There is an entire industry growing up in Ireland around vaping, and McGrath estimates that around one million bottles are sold here every month.

One of his rivals in the market is Keith Flynn, who is one of the shareholders in, and a director of, Hale Vaping, perhaps the best-known high street presence in vaping with 55 stores nationwide.

For Flynn, vaping is the best way for Ireland to achieve its target of a tobacco-free Ireland by 2025.

“On the current quit rate, that date will have to be revised to 2052, which is scary. Britain took a similar view at the same time, but the NHS has embraced vaping as an alternative. They’ll achieve the tobacco-free goal by 2025, maybe even before, and they’re accrediting it to embracing vaping.”

As such, Flynn is keen to point out that his customers are coming in because of “pressure from home, or advice from a doctor or a GP” and that their staff are given cards at Christmas with customers telling them how much better they feel and how much money they’ve saved.

He believes that the government should simply give everyone the facts, and pointed out that the state’s anti-smoking website – Quit.ie – doesn’t have any information on vaping.

Both men know there are manufacturers outside Ireland which don’t adhere to the regulatory and production standards that he and Flynn do. McGrath points to a picture of several brands of e-juice that bear similarities to well-known brands: Mors, in the branding of a Mars bar; Airo, in the branding of an Aero bar; Tripleone, apeing the design of a Toblerone pack; a product called Cocak-Cola; and one called Capri-Con, in the bright blue and orange packaging of Capri-Sun.

Those products are not made in Ireland and not currently available in Ireland, Flynn says – the picture was taken in a store in Manchester – but the intent was clear, in his mind.

“I see that as aimed at children,” he says, children who might be drawn to the familiar brands and alluring flavours.

The problem, McGrath says, is that the more flavour compound that is dropped into the e-juice, the greater the risk of toxic chemicals.

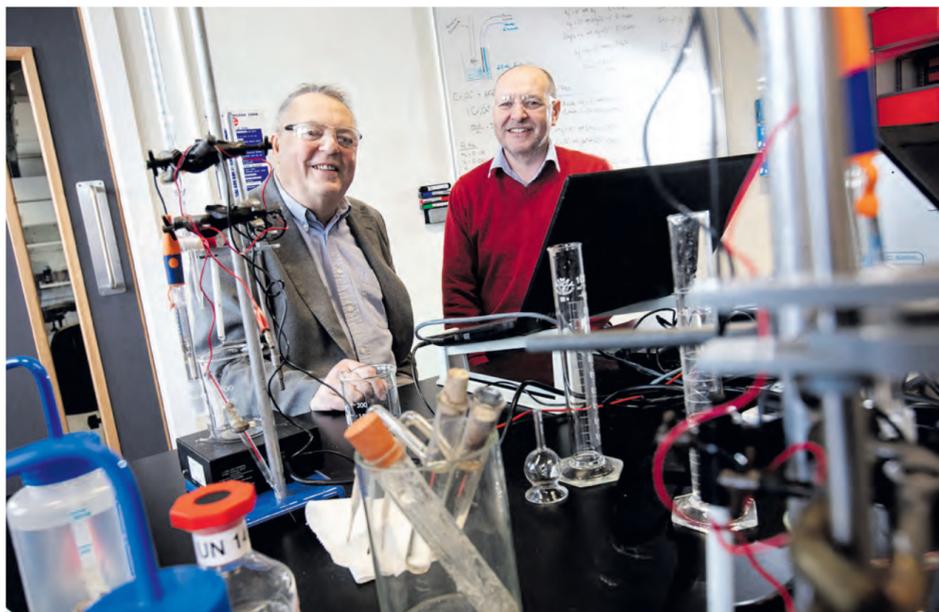
And for all the regulatory and production standards he and Flynn have to adhere to – from ISO 9001 to HSE inspections to the Tobacco Products Directive – there is a healthy trade of not-quite black market, but certainly low quality and lost cost e-juice products in discount retailers across the country.

So while both insist on the value of vaping as a tool to quit smoking, the wider question remains unanswered: can we actually say that vaping is safe?

Not according to University College Cork chemists John Wenger and John Sodeau. They argue that while smoking a cigarette is bad – they describe it as like sticking a lump of coal in your mouth, lighting it up, and blowing out black, sooty smoke – vaping is like sneezing into someone’s face, spraying a jet of tiny water droplets into their lungs.

Neither is a particularly pleasant experience, and both are capable of transmitting unpleasant and harmful chemicals, just in different ways.

According to Wenger and Sodeau, the most recent scientific research bears this out. They pointed to a succession



John Sodeau and John Wenger, chemists at University College Cork, argue that vaping can be harmful

Cathal Noonan

of studies over the last five years alone that have either concluded that the data is insufficient, or made negative findings about the impacts of vaping.

In 2014, for example, the journal Tobacco Control published a summary of the medical and scientific articles that had been published up to that point, and outlined their findings.

The conclusions were stark. There were, it pointed out, “limited data on the effects of recurrent long-term exposures to aerosolised nicotine, flavourings and PG [propylene glycol, a component of the aerosol in e-cigarettes].”

More than that, it wasn’t clear how much nicotine people were getting from the variety of aerosol delivery systems, or whether there was a ‘learning curve’ for e-cigarette use – meaning people might learn to use them differently and more frequently than cigarettes.

In 2017, the journal of the American Heart Association published a study that found “there is increasing evidence that e-cigarettes emit considerable levels of toxicants, such as nicotine, volatile organic compounds, and carbonyls, in addition to releasing particulate matter” – and, thus, had the potential to harm both users and non-users alike.

That report stated that, “whether or not the levels of these toxicants are lower than traditional smoking remains controversial”. It added that “recent studies showed that e-cigarettes emitted chemicals reach levels comparable to tobacco smoke, and those levels vary depending on multiple factors, including types of devices, e-liquid, vaping topography and vaping experience”.

The same year, a study by the American Thoracic Society’s American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine concluded that “E-cigarettes appear to trigger unique immune responses as well as the same ones triggered by regular cigarettes”.

It continued: “Although e-cigarette vapor may be less hazardous than tobacco smoke, our findings can be used to challenge the idea that e-cigarette vapor is safe, because many of the volatile organic compounds we identified are carcinogenic.”

It especially warned about the manner



Professor John Crown: ‘We cannot say for sure that vaping is safe’

in which such products are advertised to teenagers.

Just last year, the journal Vascular Medicine went further, stating that there were “observed changes in peripheral and central blood pressure and also in pulse wave velocity after smoking a cigarette as well as after vaping a nicotine-containing electronic cigarette”.

These findings, the researchers concluded, “may be associated with an increased long-term cardiovascular risk”.

A press release associated with the paper stated that “the study has provided clear evidence of the potential cardiovascular issues from acute e-cigarette use and diminishes the common thought that e-cigarettes are a lower risk than tobacco products”.

“At the moment, we don’t know

“The ambition of government for the tobacco industry should be bankruptcy

precisely the health effects of vaping. Smoking tobacco’s been around for 5,000 years, and it’s only around 20 or 30 years since we’ve begun to think that there’s health problem,” says Wenger.

“E-cigarettes have only been around 15 years, so you can’t really expect to be in a state of full knowledge. We may have to wait another decade or two before some of these longer-term effects can be measured. The question must arise – do you want to treat these things as innocent until proven guilty, or Napoleonic code, guilty until proven innocent?”

It’s a view shared by Professor John Crown, one of the country’s most high-profile consultant oncologists.

Crown has in the past been linked to positive comments about vaping – last year a publicity email sent out by an Irish company called VIP E-Cigarette quoted Crown heavily as saying that “vaping is vastly less harmful than smoking” and that “I would absolutely push for e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation strategy”.

But he insists that these quotes do not reflect his views. Granted, vaping is less bad for you than smoking cigarettes, but that’s in the context that “cigarette smoking is about the worst thing a person can do in terms of increasing risk of cancer”, Crown says.

“We cannot say for sure that vaping is safe,” he says, pointing out that he had in the past co-sponsored legislation that would have restricted vaping – the Public Health (Regulation of Electronic Cigarettes) Bill 2015 – “much to the irritation of the industry”.

Crown acknowledges that, for some people, “it would appear that vaping is a good bridge to get off smoking onto something less harmful. The idea is to break the nicotine addiction cycle. However, as long as you are vaping, there’s a chance you’ll relapse onto smoking”.

Even in the short time since his co-sponsored bill, research has developed and further fleshed out the idea that vaping is more harmful than the industry would have us believe.

“Nicotine is not a non-toxic substance. It can cause problems in blood vessels, making heart rates speed up; it can cause stress-related illnesses; it can cause gastro-intestinal problems; issues with the

brain. It is a drug,” Crown says.

“The alternative is a less dangerous drug delivery system, the same way that methadone might be a reasonable way to get off intravenous drugs.”

There’s an argument for supervised use of vaping products as a smoking cessation mechanism, Crown believes, but the idea of leaving them loosely regulated and open for recreational use, he says, clearly a bad idea. “I’m troubled by the suggestion that vaping is somehow harmless.”

In spite of this scientific and regulatory vacuum, the push behind vaping continues unabated. Just last week, for example, Fine Gael senator Catherine Noone came out to advocate greater use of vaping as a quitting tool to help Ireland meet its non-smoking targets.

Her talking points – that it’s an excellent smoking-cessation tool, that it would help Ireland reach its tobacco-free targets, and that Britain had done so already with some success – mirrored largely the vaping industry’s own views on the subject.

Noone has been the subject of significant lobbying on this issue. Over the last two years, she has met with representatives of PJ Carroll three times, received an email of thanks for her comments on vaping and taken a phone call about the firm’s latest e-cigarette news, according to the lobbying register.

She has also met with lobbyists for Philip Morris, has taken a phone call from Japan Tobacco International, and met with representatives of Vape Business Ireland.

Noone is by no means alone. In her own party, for example, several of her colleagues have met multiple times with Big Tobacco or its proxies, such as Noel Rock, Colm Burke and Bernard Durkan.

It’s a reflection of just how many lobbying avenues Big Tobacco has opened up, and how much it has focused its energies on the issue of vaping.

Philip Morris – the maker of Marlboro – has met with multiple politicians and representatives of the Revenue Commissioners about what it describes as its “work in the area of potentially Reduced Risk Products (RRPs)” which is “the term we use to refer to products with the potential to reduce individual risk and population harm in comparison to smoking cigarettes”.

PJ Carroll, which is owned by British American Tobacco, has also lobbied to “highlight the UK progressive approach to e-cigarettes vs Ireland and the potential role of e-cigarettes in achieving Tobacco Free Ireland objectives”.

In emails to a number of TDs, the company highlighted “the need for a debate on vaping by the Oireachtas Health Committee” and offered to share “Share BAT’s 2018 Harm Reduction Focus Report”.

PJ Carroll also sent a series of emails to Irish politicians arguing, “it is vital that the government does not make e-cigarettes prohibitively expensive”.

The company says the state’s failure to support the use of e-cigarettes was part of the reason “Ireland’s smoking prevalence rate is 22 per cent”, and that the HSE had claimed Ireland would not be tobacco-free – meaning a smoking rate of 5 per cent or less – until 2052.

Along with PMI and BAT, Imperial Tobacco, the maker of the John Players brand of cigarettes, has deployed lobbyists to call and meet with TDs to “to ensure all cigarette products are taxed



Maura Hickey



on the same basis" – meaning, of course, keeping the tax on e-cigarettes low. Big tobacco also works through local organisations, including Vape Business Ireland, where one of the directors is Keith Flynn of Hale. Flynn's fellow members include wine and cigar distributor Ampersand, the national lobby group of convenience stores and newsagents association CSNA, the National Federation of Retail Newsagents, convenience store distributor Primeline,

and a handful of Irish and international vaping-related companies such as Nerudia, Nicopure Labs, Multi-Cig, Madvapes and the eCig Store. Alongside those sit some of the biggest names in cigarettes, such as Philip Morris International, PJ Carroll and John Player (while Japanese Tobacco is a former member, having recently resigned its membership). Flynn told The Sunday Business Post that his goal was merely to pro-



Killian McGrath of Liquid Solutions, a Waterford company that manufactures and sells liquids for vaping Dylan Vaughan

“However scientifically unfounded the health claims for e-cigarettes might be, big tobacco wants to bask in that glow

vide worthwhile information to policy makers. “We’re not trying to push one brand, we’re keeping it around vaping and the generic information. That way, the consumer has choice,” he says. According to Karen Evans-Reeves, a research fellow at the Tobacco Control Research Group at the University of Bath, all of this is indicative of just how much effort the big tobacco companies are putting into lobbying national politicians – as well as being illustrative of their tactical approach. For Evans-Reeves, part of their advocacy for smoking cessation measures is the value in blurring the lines between the liquid vaporisers that Killian McGrath and Keith Flynn make – the majority of which are made by small operators

around the world – and the heated tobacco products that still use tobacco. “It’s about how tobacco companies are promoting a different non-combustible product and how they’re putting themselves in the same space as e-cigarettes intentionally,” she says. According to Evans-Reeves, however scientifically unfounded the health claims for e-cigarettes might be, big tobacco wants to bask in that glow. “The industry is likely to know that people will be confused, it knows it can control this dialogue, trying to push its heated tobacco – which it controls,” she says. A recent investigation by Reuters found that Philip Morris in particular had devoted tens of millions to a massive global lobbying campaign on its par-

ticular heated tobacco products, taking particular aim at what they described as “the anti-tobacco extremists of the World Health Organisation”. For Evans-Reeves, it highlights their hypocrisy in attempting to sell their heated tobacco products as safer alternatives to smoking where there is currently no independent evidence to bear this out. “If they are genuinely committed to harm reduction, as they seem to be claiming in Britain, then why are they still selling their cigarettes to young people in low to middle-income countries? Why are they challenging legislation that would affect their products?”

For John Crown, Big Tobacco has no place in any government initiatives to reduce smoking in Ireland. “I have an ideological position on this, and it’s that there is never any reason for any government to be working in any way, shape or form with any tobacco industry,” he says. “The tobacco industry and the government should be completely adversarial in their relationship, because the government has the interest of its citizens at heart, while tobacco has been making profit at the expense of health. “They have no common ground and there should be no meetings other than prosecutorial.” In Crown’s view, the government should do anything it can to reduce smoking rates, and that should include everything from putting a tax on companies, to the setting of a date for which it should be illegal to manufacture tobacco products for profit. “If tobacco were discovered tomorrow, it would not be legal. Stuff far less dangerous than tobacco has been banned, but this got grandfathered in,” he says. “The ambition of government for the tobacco industry should be bankruptcy.”



Construction Management Summit

MARCH 29 | CROKE PARK

Preparing you and your construction business for the road ahead...



David Meade
BBC Broadcaster, International Keynote Speaker, Trainer, & Corporate Facilitator for Apple, Harvard, BT & Facebook



Stephen Bowcott
CEO, John Sisk & Sons



Kieran McQuinn
Research Professor, The Economic and Social Research Institute



Eibhlin O'Connor
Head of Delivery, Clúid Housing Association



Mary Liz Trant, PHD
Executive Director, SOLAS



Patrick Durkan
Managing Director, Durkan Residential



David Clark
Head of Manufacturing and Innovation, McAvoy Group



Pat Lucey
President, the Construction Industry Federation

Tickets
Only €275
plus VAT

CONSTRUCTIONSUMMIT.IE

