

# Neil Cotter

@NewsNeil13

Raging they remade IT as family entertainment

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**JOSEPHA** Madigan's remarks about Local Property Tax have stunned lots of people around the country. And rightly so — the Culture Minister, *right*, wants lower rates in affluent areas. A TD in South Dublin, she's obviously very worried that tax bills for her constituents are set to soar, and with a general election looming. Fine Gael Deputy Madigan

proclaimed: "I would like to see a lower rate in areas with the highest house prices." Yes, that will go down well in places where families are already out of cash once the mortgage has been paid every month. Never mind the ability to pay, Josepha, let's just give the stock-brokers and bankers

in your backyard a free pass. She's been referred to as a rising star within Fine Gael, but all she seems to have done here is give us a glimpse into a dystopian future to match our wretched recent past. Shield the wealthy, and let the poor and struggling pay the price. Take a hike, Minister...



**THE FAI's birthday tweet for Declan Rice could go either way. On the face of it, when the player is still (publicly anyway) agonising over whether to play for Ireland or England, the tweet, *right*, seems ill-advised. Or maybe they know something we don't? History will either forget all about it or use it as yet another stick to beat them with. It came on a day when we in the Irish Sun published details of the Association's regular early drawdowns of funding from Sport Ireland. I wouldn't be naive or conceited enough to suggest they risked sabotaging moves for the best player we'll have for many years to deflect from a fairly harmless story. But this is the FAI we're talking about!**



## IT'S LIKE A MARTY PARTY IN PARNELL

**SOME** football is just better suited to small grounds. In Parnell Park on Saturday, it reminded me of what I love about Dublin playing there.

The O'Byrne Cup semi-final clash between Meath and Dublin's emerging talent was a nip and tuck affair that could have gone either way.

The ground was close to full and the atmosphere — for a competition both sets of supporters could take or leave — was excellent.

The kids were on the pitch at half-time, sliotars and footballs (and even one rugby ball) being lashed all over the place.

I'd love to see league football back in Donnycarney. Even with 30,000 souls present, Croker for most league games is a hollow, soulless place.

I remember years ago someone shouting at RTE's most famous commentator, *top*, as he prowled the Parnell sideline. "Marty, you're only gorgeous", and it felt like the entire stadium was in on the joke.

I know money talks, so it will never happen, but it would be marvellous to see some league games back there. Although Marty might not agree.

# It's time to show Mr Ross the door

**Knock knock.**

"Who's there?"

"Shane Ross."

"Get the hell away from my doorstep, it's Christmas Eve for Christ's sake."

He's been called the do-nothing Minister on account of the fact he does nothing as a Minister.

But the Independent Alliance TD burns through some amount of shoe leather when it comes to his local work.

As everyone knows by now, and as my amazing joke alludes to, Mr Ross went on his rounds just when Santa was ready to land and then again on New Year's Eve just as people were gearing up to party.

Either he hasn't much going on himself, or he just really, really wants to keep his face out there.

But if you lived in the constituency of Dublin-Rathdown, you could barely miss the guy.

Over the Christmas, the Deputy suggested a car carrying a sleigh and a giant photo of his mug around his 'hood was the work of another mystery publicity junkie.

"There's a photograph of me on the car", he said while getting it in the neck from the Road Safety Authority, "but it has nothing to do with me."

Having nothing to do with anything is a familiar refrain for Lord Ross, but we'll get

back to that later. What would you do if he called to your door during the holidays?

If you were the principal of a posh fee-paying school, you'd probably ask him for another all-weather pitch.

But if you're a normal person, you'd most likely send him packing.

The guy is ineffective as Minister, regularly criticised for his performance across Sport, Tourism and Transport.

He doesn't always seem to have much interest in what he's supposed to be doing, his indifference being very apparent on the occasions he brings himself to speak publicly about any of them.

When it comes to matters of his constituency, however, he'd plunk himself down at some out' one's table for Christmas dinner if he thought it would get him a first preference vote.

In a way, that commitment to the people who elected him in 2016 is admirable.

If he was a regular TD being paid the basic €94,535 for his local work, he would probably be held up as some kind of prototype — he got Stepside Garda Station reopened for goodness sake!

But it's the extra €74,230 he trousers to do nothing as Minister and meddle in affairs that shouldn't really concern him that makes him such a target for the haters. In recent

months we've had a greater insight into how he works.

He wrote to the National Transport Authority after a constituent had her car clamped to "strongly ask" it to reconsider the penalty.

The woman bypassed the appeals process and used her obedient local TD, who should have more on his plate to make her case instead.

He's well used to working for both sides, as those who followed the BusConnects proposals would know.

The NTA is responsible for the roll-out of the €2billion transportation overhaul, and is answerable to Mr Ross as Transport Minister.

Yet at a residents meeting in September of last year, he told constituents he had nothing to do with the Bus Connects plan and had no responsibility for the NTA.

Local Fianna Fail councillor Shay Brennan branded the

**A BAD CALL... TD knocked in at Xmas**



comments "astonishing". Ross, who has a neck like a sun-baked rhino, also wrote to the NTA to complain about proposed changes which would affect — you guessed it — his constituents, and asked them to review the current plan.

With so many people to help locally, no wonder he doesn't want to get his hands dirty nationally — that's why he shouldn't be Transport Minister.

He doesn't seem able to strike a balance between his commitments to his people and duties to the rest of us.

He is obsessed with judicial reform, believing that judges should have only a limited role in judicial appointments.

What he sees as cronyism seems even more important to him as drinking coffee with constituents and billing the taxpayer for it.

He may be right, but in the overall scheme of things it all seems irrelevant.

His plans to target motorists for every little offence, such as penalty points for not being able to produce a driver's licence on the spot, have also sparked fury.

Then there's sport — he's talking about Ireland hosting the Ryder Cup again and the Olympics. What a joke.

The lad couldn't organise a game of 5-a-side.

Unless it was in his own constituency, where it would be the greatest 5-a-side ever.



## AN AILING HOSPITAL PROJECT

**WE** should know more shortly about what has turned the proposed Children's Hospital from a €485million project into a €2billion catastrophe.

The Oireachtas Health Committee will begin hearings, while consultants PwC (don't consultants do very well in this country?) will conduct a separate investigation.

It will become the most expensive children's hospital in the world, but don't worry, Health Minister Simon Harris will not apologise for spending money on our youngsters.

Make no mistake, this here is a national scandal in the making.

And I bet not a single head will roll.

## CHAMP OF THE WEEK

**ANDY MURRAY** announced his retirement from tennis last week. He might look grumpy, but he's been an ambassador for the sport and social issues. He was very unlucky to excel at the same time as three of the best ever to play the sport.



## CHUMP OF THE WEEK

**BREXITEERS.** If it wasn't so serious, we'd all be sitting down with popcorn today to watch the Theresa May tragi-comedy unfold in the House of Commons. It's at times like this I give thanks for our lot, who seem positively competent by comparison.



## Not Coming to a Cinema, please..

**EDDIE** Murphy, if you are reading this, please don't make a Coming to America 2 movie.

The original, *right*, was perfection, but it was borne from a time and a place that was ripe for comedy.

The Eighties, Nineties and early Noughties were fertile breeding grounds for comedians because they were free to operate without fear of offending someone, somewhere, somehow.

Today, the world is a desert.

Comedy genius Jennifer Saunders, of French and Saunders and Absolutely Fabulous fame, has spoken about how tiring it is writing for snowflakes.

With so many people ready to take offence on behalf of others, there's too much in Coming to America 2 that could upset them.

It would not make your Soul Glo.



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Not feeling so tired the last few weeks.

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LEO Varadkar is clearly no fan of funny-man Oliver Callan.

Satirist Oliver — who writes a column for the Irish Sun — makes a very good living tearing the 'Teesh' to shreds in his show.

His Leo is forever going on about his pecs, being "totes" young, and using words like "awks" to describe stories about "povs" (homeless people). And it's clearly tak-

ing its toll on Varadkar, *far left*, who went all out for revenge at a dinner last week.

Unfortunately, the Fine Gael leader's act fell horribly flat.

He, eh, quipped: "I do enjoy his work. It does, always, make me think and laugh.

"Whenever I hear him doing a voiceover ad for a supermarket it never fails to make me think and when I read his

journalism it never fails to make me laugh. Sorry — the other way around.

"My apologies!"

Leo ended up as a figure of fun in Miriam Lord's column in the Irish Times.

Whatever about getting a hard time in the Irish Sun, seeing himself lampooned in his beloved broadsheets will certainly drive the Taoiseach totes crazy.

And also give Oliver, *left*, plenty more material to stick the boot in.

WHILE buying a toaster and kettle combo in an appliance shop over the weekend, I realised how dull I am.

I was deliberating for ages over all the various colour combos, before opting for cream.

Once I had paid my money, I went out to get the old set to dump in the recycling.

I picked up my older but otherwise exact same cream toaster/kettle combo and realised I hate change.

The staff had a good laugh out of it too!

## Papers kept FAI crisis ball in play



### NIC PUTS MAYBOT TO THE SWORD

NICOLA Sturgeon has the distinct honour of being responsible for the most brutal Brexit put-down thus far.

The SNP chief quipped last week: "Theresa May must be the only leader in memory that tried to fall on her own sword and missed."

Even someone who has been dubbed the Maybot and who has shipped more deserved criticism than even the toughest human being could handle must have been stung by that dig from Sturgeon, *above*.

The British Prime Minister now looks set to call another general election over there as a last role of the dice after seeing her deal rejected for a third time by MPs just last week.

In fairness to the Conservative leader, she is surrounded by some of the most self-serving, dangerous hypocrites on the face of this planet.

But as we have seen time and again, this lame duck PM can do absolutely nothing right.

The world is embarrassed for her and British politics.

I ALWAYS promised myself I would never write one of those tedious columns about why newspapers are still important.

You know, those excruciating articles begging a dwindling readership to stick with print as we hurtle deeper into the digital era.

The articles plead relevance, purpose, agenda-setting magnificence but come across as weirdly pathetic.

Well I'm sorry, but after the few weeks that have been in it I feel like it's time to go back on my word and write one of those very articles.

The ongoing John Delaney saga has captured the Irish public's imagination, and the tired old newspapers have been to the forefront.

Tomorrow, a delegation from Sport Ireland appears before an Oireachtas committee to discuss its funding of the FAI after two turbulent weeks at the highest level of Irish sport.

This goes back to last November when the Martin O'Neill sacking was dominating the agenda. We called to "End

the Secrecy" in a two-page spread before revealing the next month that Delaney was wanted for questioning at the Oireachtas committee.

In January, we wrote about the FAI's unusual arrangements with their financial overlords, and this story will form a significant line of questioning in Leinster House tomorrow.

Delaney, *below*, has over the years regularly gone to John Treacy in Sport Ireland requesting early draw-downs of millions of euro of funding they hadn't even been allocated yet — and got it every time.

It's not illegal, but it's highly unusual. The GAA and IRFU have no need to do it. The urgent need for a relatively minor amount of cash in a €50million-a-year body was the first visible kink in the FAI's financial armoury.

It would take a while for momentum to build, however.

Then earlier this month Delaney, for reasons best known to himself, decided to try to injunct what might have been a quickly forgotten Sunday Times story about a €100,000 cheque.

He lost, the story was published and the bandwagon started to roll.

The cheque may prove to be the most cataclysmic written in

Irish sporting history — or it might prove to be nothing more than another example of questionable FAI governance.

Time, maybe some TDs, the ODCE or independent auditors will be the judge of that.

Right now, though, it's the reason why Delaney's appearance at the committee next week is so important.

He's been before this crowd before, but managed to survive. Kevin O'Keeffe is due to take part again this week. Readers of this paper will know that Delaney secured him two tickets to the 2018 World Cup, which the TD paid for in full.

Kevin doesn't see it as a problem, but I think it is a problem and I'd fully expect he will be asked to recuse himself.

Sport Ireland are supposedly engaging with the FAI at the moment to clarify their position on the cheque (which is the reason given by Minister Shane Ross for saying practically nothing of any value since this all kicked off).

I get the feeling this won't prevent them speaking frankly in Leinster House tomorrow.

Anyone expecting fireworks from Delaney or the FAI next week will be disappointed however. The board has set up a sub-committee, which employed consultants Mazars to conduct an independent review into all this stuff that's been in the newspapers.

To me, this gives them an opt-out clause next week. He was supposed to have appeared



## MINISTER UN-DON BY DUDS OF PARTY

PASCHAL Donohoe will be absolutely raging.

The Finance Minister, *below*, probably thinks he's doing a grand job, but he's being sucked into the mire of mediocrity by his underperforming colleagues, if the latest Red C poll is to be believed.

Even with the jobless figures low, voters only gave the Government a 5/10 on the economy.

No doubt there's an element of contagion there, with Eoghan Murphy's Housing getting a very high 3/10 and Simon Harris's Health a miserable 4 for obvious reasons.

Only on Brexit — coming in at 6/10 with the public — did they manage any kind of decent score.

It makes grim reading for Fine Gael heading into the local and Euro elections.



## CHAMP OF THE WEEK

I DIDN'T know PAT McAULIFFE personally, but I know the difference between tributes that go through the motions and the real deal. The late

sports reporter was widely admired not only for his skills but also as a thoroughly decent guy.

## CHUMP OF THE WEEK

FAKE news media outlets have wrecked the April Fool's Day joke for the rest of us — because everyone is suspicious of real news never mind the gags. A left-handed Whopper from Burger King, anyone?



## HOUSING NEEDS A 'MADDY RUSH'

A LACK of supply is the main cause of Ireland's homeless crisis.

There are loads of reasons why houses are not being built in sufficient numbers, but if anyone is in need of inspiration they should look no further than this cottage in Glenamaddy.

When the uninsured home of Jeremy, Melanie and Finn Zanni, *right*, burnt down, a small team of local volunteers offered their services for free and it took just a few weeks to build.

In classic rural Ireland style, it's a two fingers to Dublin, the Government and other agencies dragging their heels on house building.

Michael Fitzmaurice TD, *left and with family*, got the rebuild in the Galway town going and declared: "I don't know why we are huffing and puffing about building a block of houses. To build a house isn't complicated. It's what we make complicated with bulls\*\*\*." Amen.



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Happy World Down Syndrome Day

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**RICKY** Gervais has managed to pull off the impossible — a comedy about an obnoxious, hate-filled suicidal hack who ends up charming everybody.

Sure, it takes viewers on a rollercoaster ride and to places we would rather not, but *After Life* on Netflix is a work on a par with anything he's done since *The Office*.

And even then, he's not far off as he's broken new ground here as he did with *David Brent*.

How we should react to death or how we grieve is not defined. Grief doesn't come with an

instruction manual providing a step-by-step account on how we should get our act together.

Gervais' *After Life* is the type of take on death that hasn't been on TV before.

It's very him, his stand-up routine in dramatic form.

The series is brutal, dark, unrelenting while at the same time uplifting, poignant, oozing in sentimentality, funny and — in typical Gervais style — cringeworthy.

Go watch it!



ONE night a DJ in a really cheesy nightclub announced he was going to give away a few hats, and flung them on to the dance floor.

As we surged forward to collect our prize, he said "watch the tw\*\*s pick up the hats".

It was humiliating, but I still have mine to this day. Anyway, it would take a special kind of "tw\*\*" to pick up one particular hat — the \$50 St Patrick's Day version of Make America Great Again.

It goes to show that we in Ireland aren't the only ones adept at fleecing Americans on March 17.



## JACKSON KING OF COPPERS SUCCESS

**CATHAL** Jackson will go down in history as a revolutionary Irishman.

OK, he's no Michael Collins but the former garda is a man who created a cultural icon from the basement of a hotel on Harcourt Street.

Copper Face Jacks — and the Jackson Court above it — has gone up for sale for €40million after 23 years under his and wife Paula's guiding hand.

Magic, marriage, babies and history were made against a backdrop of S Club 7, while its owner made a fortune from the cloakroom and everything else inside.

The institution made its way to the steps of the Hogan Stand in 2011 when Dublin won their breakthrough All-Ireland.

The new owners — be it Supermac's supremo Pat McDonagh or anyone else — will have their own ideas on how to run it.

But as long as they leave it well alone, the nation's youth will continue — in the words of Dubs skipper Brian Cullen — to see you all in Coppers.

## DOSH SOME WAY TO RUN CASH FLOW

THE FAI, despite reportedly being in rude financial health, has proven very eager to get its state funding before it had even been allocated.

In recent years it has regularly applied for and received Sport Ireland cash early, including in February and March 2017, which is something neither the GAA nor IRFU have had to do.

Its CEO John Delaney, above, wrote a cheque to his employer in April 2017 to cover some cash flow issues. I've never run a €50m-a-year business, so you'll have to bear with me here.

The FAI had just come off a record year in 2016, and had two home matches in March. Should cash flow be an issue at that point?

This will undoubtedly form some of the basis for questioning when he appears before the Oireachtas committee on April 10.



# I am Down with being optimistic

**I NEVER** really thought about Down syndrome until one day I was told my child would have it.

It's news that can floor you. People usually need a little help absorbing it, because often they think it's the worst news in the world.

It really isn't — but sometimes that can get lost in translation.

We had 16 weeks between Ted's diagnosis in 2017 and his birth, which was more than enough time to make my peace with it.

For others it's not, so how docs speak to them is quite important.

Many only find out when their baby is born, when their world comes crashing in, and they need the right words more than ever.

I learned pretty quickly what having an extra chromosome is all about.

But I've also seen since how some medics still haven't quite got the hang of talking about it. Our otherwise healthy son was born — hilariously — with his tongue sticking out, and we were in love.

Mercifully, Ted didn't have any of the heart, immune or blood problems that can be associated with the condition.

But that didn't spare us the doom and gloom worst-case scenario chat.

Before we'd even put him in his own cot, we'd been warned about potential digestive problems, vision and hearing impediments, told he might not walk, go to mainstream school or achieve a mental age of more than 14.

There was nothing positive in it, but I wasn't really listening.

He might suffer from all or any of those problems or none at all.

Worst case scenarios are for fiscal planning, not healthy babies.

It's only ever been medical professionals who've asked the pointed questions. One recently queried whether we knew before birth. When we said we did, she asked: "And you still went ahead with it?"

She didn't mean any offence. Another asked: "Would it put you off having more?"

Jesus, maybe it would. I hadn't really thought about it but thanks for making me think.

Then we got from someone else: "If you knew sooner would you have done something about it?"

Presuming she meant "would you have had an abortion", the answer was no. The hospital we went to was first class. The staff were compassionate, the consultant extraordinary. Not one individual who asked the ques-

tions went out to cause upset. But considering around 7,000 Irish people have Down syndrome, I thought medics in general would have learned to be a bit more thoughtful in their use of language.

The most common response from non-medical folk, in non-medical terms, was "everything will be grand".

You don't expect a doctor to pop open the champagne and say 'congrats lads you're having a baby with a genetic chromosomal disorder', so they're walking a tightrope.

But there has to be a way.

From my experience, they should tone down the dread, inject some positivity, and have the chat about the other stuff when the shock has subsided.

Doctors' words are powerful. Patients hang on every one of them.

Things like "bad news", "I'm so sorry", and "I'm afraid to tell you" resonate.

From what I've heard from families of people with DS, whatever negativity exists at first evaporates sooner or later.

The doom and gloom does not serve anyone well, because there are fates far worse than Down syndrome.

In the 16 weeks between early detection, eventual confirmation and since, it got to me really only once.

On the day we were told he might have it, I got lazy and put the bike in the back of the car.

When I got home, the bike got stuck and I ended up booting it. After that, everything was indeed grand. Yes, younger babies reach the famous "milestones" before he does.

He sat up for the first time approaching his first birthday, and at 18 months he's still perfecting the commando crawl. He won't walk for ages, but he will eventually.

Ted is a jubilant character, a singer, a babler and a baller who sounds like a dolphin when he laughs.

He's a joy to come home to. The boy will be grand. I keep joking that he "just about" got Down syndrome.

I found myself googling things like "geniuses with Down syndrome" and "what do you do if your Down syndrome baby has a high IQ?"

We try to guess whether strangers have spotted it, when let's face it they probably have. But that's how it is when you bin the negativity. As a lifelong pessimist, I can't explain it.

Perhaps I'm still in blissful denial. Maybe I'll be walking him to school for the first time four years from now and suddenly think "why didn't anybody tell me he's got Down syndrome?"

But we dream just a little differently than before. Optimism is good.

It's better than obsessing over the 'what ifs' that might never be.



WORDS ARE POWERFUL... doctor



## SIGHT OF CON HAD LEO GREEN

YOU know the feeling you get when you go on holiday and you bump into some annoying bloke from home?

Leo Varadkar was furious when he took his place in the Chicago Paddy's Day event and found Conor McGregor standing next to him.

He had to be nice, but that courtesy didn't extend to actually talking to McGregor, who walked a few feet away without a flicker of recognition from the politician.

Of course it's up to organisers to invite who they like but Leo should have known whether anyone else would be invited to the party.

No A-lister worth their salt turns up as star guest unless they receive assurances they won't be upstaged. Chicago made a fool of Leo, who looked as green as their river.

## CHAMP OF THE WEEK



**THELMA** Chiaka delivered six babies in just nine minutes. The Texan's four boys and two girls weighed about a tin of beans each — and we are told she was "too tired" to name the lads by the time the news broke.

## CHUMP OF THE WEEK

**JOHN** Delaney. It's extraordinary the FAI boss would seek a last-minute High Court injunction at a huge personal financial cost to keep a story about temporary cash flow issues out of the media. All he managed to do was get everyone really interested.

