

KNEECAP OWE KEIR STARMER AND THE BBC A THANK YOU

Kathy Sheridan
Opinion



“We’re doing the vows and then our daughter, overwhelmed by the occasion, bursts into happy tears. What a gift to get married when your children are there to see it happening

Róisín Ingle
Life



HOW TO JUGGLE WORK AND KIDS WITHOUT WRECKING YOUR FINANCES

Joanne Hunt
Money Matters

Coalition sharply divided over fees for third level

FG privately seething over controversy as Opposition parties unite in anger

Minister for Education’s suggestion of €1,000 increase in costs sparks ‘panic’

PAT LEAHY,
DENIS STAUNTON
and MARIE O’HALLORAN

The Coalition remains sharply divided on the issue of college fees after Opposition parties united in anger at recent suggestions from Fianna Fáil Minister for Further and Higher Education James Lawless that the student contribution could increase by as much as €1,000 next year.

Fine Gael was privately seething at the controversy, with party sources saying their TDs had received a barrage of representations from concerned parents and students, while radio shows and social media channels were also full of opposition to the measure.

One party source said there had been “panic” following Mr Lawless’s suggestions, pointing to “two days on Liveline” and also how the issue dominated Leaders’ Questions in the Dáil.

“I’m pleading with ye today not to go ahead with this – Fine Gael backbencher Willie Aird

Fine Gael backbencher Willie Aird said very few students have parents “with deep pockets who can come up with this €1,000”.

“I’m pleading with ye today not to go ahead with this,” he said in the Dáil.

Fianna Fáil sources insisted it was Mr Lawless’s responsibility to set his own budgetary priorities in the Department of Further and Higher Education, and blamed Fine Gael for overreacting to his comments.

The Government had decided not to include any cost-of-living package in the next budget, sources said, and Ministers would have to decide how to manage that in their own departments. They pointed out the commitment to reduce the student contribution fee in the Programme for Government had to be done “in a financially sustainable manner”.

One senior Fianna Fáil source also insisted that more than half of all students already receive a full or partial subsidy of their student contribution fee, adding that the income threshold for fee supports this year is at a “historic high at €115,000”.

“It is important to target those most in need,” the source said. “Families that need more will get more.”

On a visit to Japan, Taoiseach Micheál Martin sought to avoid being dragged into the row, saying the issue of student fees would be part of negotiations between individual Ministers and the Minister for Public Expenditure. “There’s a broad range of priorities there. So it’ll all go forward to negotiations,” Mr Martin said.

Escalating row

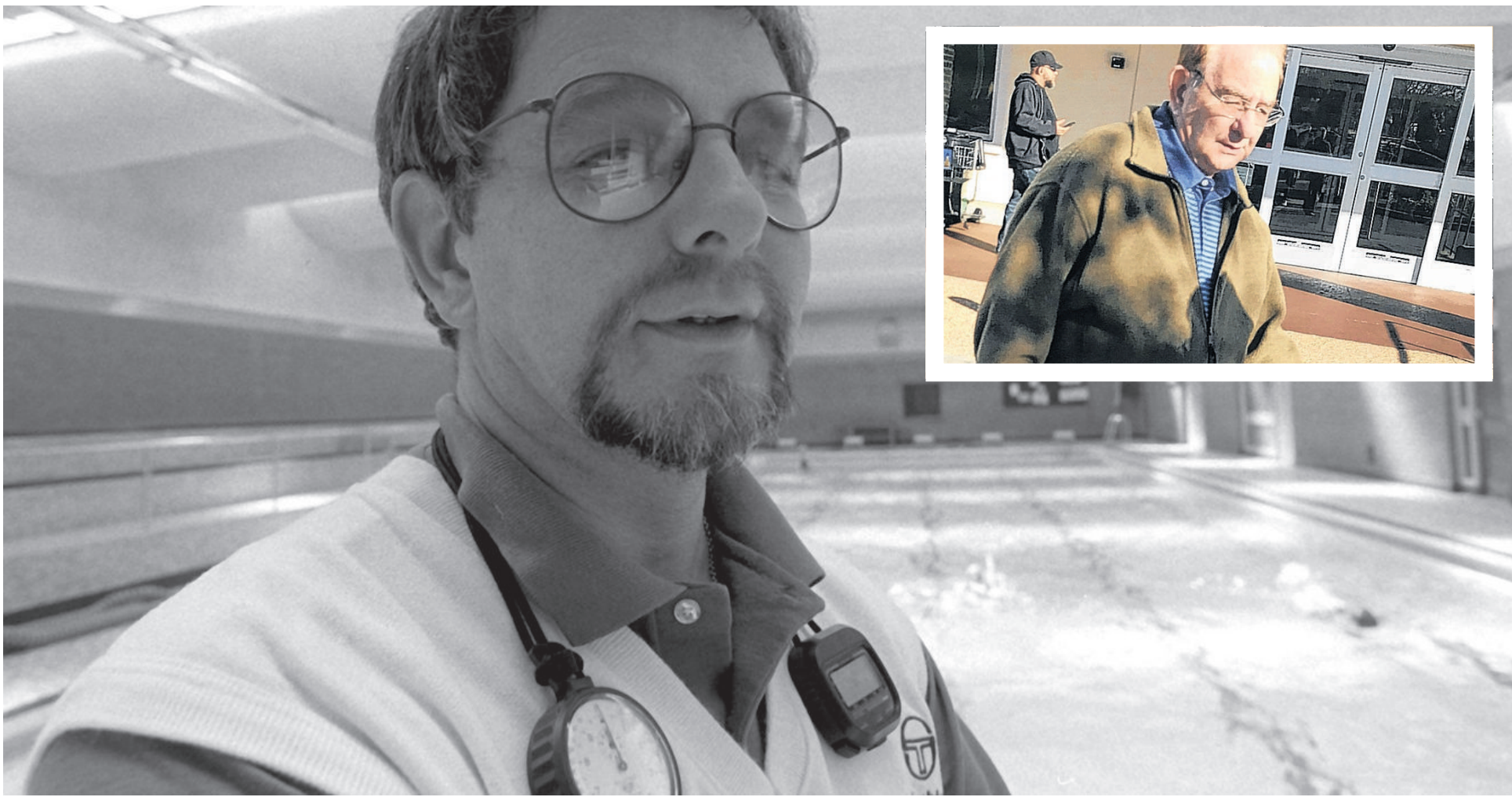
At home, Tánaiste Simon Harris also sought to avoid escalating the row in public, suggesting that some assistance to students would be included, on a permanent basis, in the budget.

Mr Harris said parents of college students should pay fees in instalments and “see where the budget brings us”.

The controversy arose after Mr Lawless said on Sunday that because the Government had decided there would be no cost-of-living package in this year’s budget, the €1,000 reduction to fees of €3,000, which was a part of recent budgets, would no longer apply – suggesting an effective €1,000 increase for many students.

The fees issue – always incendiary in Irish politics – dominated exchanges in the Dáil. Sinn Féin finance spokesman Pearse Doherty said “sending a kid to college is already costing families an arm and a leg” and “hitting them with an extra €1,000 will make going to college impossible for many, and no wonder young people are leaving this country in their droves”.

➔ Editorial comment – page 11; ‘Clarity on third-level fees? Anything but...’ – Miriam Lord, page 2



Former swim coach Gibney arrested in Florida

JACK POWER

Former Olympic swimming coach George Gibney has been arrested in the United States on foot of a Garda request to extradite him to Ireland to face charges over the sexual abuse of multiple children.

Gardaí have been investigating that Gibney sexually abused children in his care as a swimming coach several decades ago. A request was made by the Garda to the US State Department to extradite Gibney.

Gardaí are seeking to have Gibney brought back to Ireland to face more than 50 charges related to alleged historical child sex abuse, connected to his time as a swimming coach.

US authorities informed Garda Headquarters that they have taken Gibney into custody on foot of the extradition request.

It is expected Gibney will be brought before a US court where an initial hearing for his possible extradition will take place. It is understood the former coach was remanded in custody after a preliminary court

hearing, following his arrest in Florida, the source said.

Gardaí spent several months preparing the paperwork for the extradition request, following a renewed criminal investigation into allegations Gibney abused multiple children when he was a coach in Ireland.

Gibney was a well-known coach at Trojan swimming club in Dublin during the 1980s and 1990s, before abuse revelations emerged publicly. Gibney previously faced criminal charges in 1993, appearing before Dún Laoghaire District Court

charged with 27 counts of indecency against young swimmers and of having carnal knowledge of girls under the age of 15.

However, he successfully halted that prosecution by taking a judicial review. His lawyers argued there was a delay in the offences coming to court and a lack of precision in defining specific alleged incidents.

The legal challenge ended up in the Supreme Court, which ruled in his favour. Gibney fled Ireland afterwards, spending time in Scotland before moving to the US. Now in his 70s, he has

been living near Orlando, Florida, for several years.

A 2020 podcast by BBC Sounds and Second Captains, Where is George Gibney?, re-examined the case and prompted more than a dozen new alleged victims to come forward. When confronted by the podcast makers in Orlando, he refused to answer questions.

A number of the alleged victims who came forward following the documentary made criminal complaints to An Garda Síochána, who at the time had already opened a fresh in-

■ Former Olympic swimming coach George Gibney in 1988 and, inset, in Florida in 2019.

PHOTOGRAPHS: BILLY STICKLAND/INPHO AND MARK HORGAN

vestigation into alleged historical abuse by Gibney.

Following that renewed investigation a file was submitted by gardaí to the Director of Public Prosecutions in 2023. The new case relates to different instances of alleged abuse to those Gibney was previously charged with in the 1990s.

500,000 people across State use ‘at-risk’ drinking water

KEVIN O’SULLIVAN

Almost 500,000 people in the State are served by “at-risk” water supplies which need to be urgently addressed by Uisce Éireann, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has said.

While public water is safe to drink for the vast majority of people, the agency’s drinking water report for 2024, published yesterday, shows there were 45 supplies serving 497,000 people on the at-risk list – down from 57 supplies (serving 561,000 people) in 2023.

The quality of Irish drinking water from public supplies remains very high, with more than 99.8 per cent of samples compliant with bacterial and chemical standards, but Uisce Éireann must ensure the supply network is more resilient, the EPA said.

It acknowledges progress but warns moves “to protect public health by removing lead from our supply networks and houses is still far too slow”.

The legal limit for lead in drinking water will halve in 2036 (from 10 micrograms per litre (ugl) to 5ug/l) – “so much greater focus is needed by Government departments and Uisce Éireann to remove lead from the supply network and public buildings”.

THMs

It also highlights a problem of persistent levels of toxic trihalomethanes (THMs), which has been repeatedly highlighted by the EU. THMs form as a by-product when chlorine is added to water with organic matter.

THM limits were exceeded in 31 supplies, compared with 41 in 2023, while pesticide limits were exceeded in 23 supplies

– the same as 2023. Complete upgrades of supplies on the at risk list are needed to address issues with THMs and the parasite cryptosporidium, which can make people ill, “without delay”, it says.

The report highlights storms in late 2024 and early 2025 resulted in significant disruption to supplies. Boil-water notices were required due to the impacts of Storm Bert, Storm Darragh and Storm Eowyn in successive months. They caused power outages at treatment plants, resulting in water treatment processes being compromised, while extreme rainfall caused high turbidity – making water murky – with some plants unable to adequately treat water, the EPA notes.

➔ Total bonuses at Uisce Éireann top €13m: page 12

Weather

Today will be fresh with spells of sunshine and scattered showers. Highs of 14-20 degrees amid light breezes.

THE IRISH TIMES
24-28 Tara Street, Dublin 2.
D02 CX89
Telephone: (01) 9203900
Online: irishtimes.com
The recommended retail price of THE IRISH TIMES in the Republic of Ireland is €2.60
Subscriptions: Tel: (01) 92039001
Email: subscribe@irishtimes.com



Home News

McGregor appeal: Conor McGregor’s appeal against a finding in favour of Nikita Hand opened with a dramatic withdrawal of ‘fresh evidence’. Page 3

CHI clinics: Saturday outpatient clinics at Crumlin children’s hospital have jumped 240 per cent. Page 2

World News

Trump Bill: The US Senate passed President Donald Trump’s spending Bill yesterday, signing off on a package that will add \$3.3 trillion to the national debt. Page 6

Business + Commercial Property

Data centre: Herbata’s planned €3 billion Co Kildare data centre will get half its electricity from renewables and draw no power from the national grid. Page 12

Bakery profits: Bretzel Bakery, based in Portobello, Dublin, recorded a profit of €180,000 in 2024. Page 12

Sports Wednesday

Rugby: Leinster have been drawn in the same pool as Ronan O’Gara’s La Rochelle for next season’s Champions Cup, continuing a growing rivalry. Page 19

Gaelic Games: Ger Brennan is favourite to become the new Dublin football manager after quitting Louth. Page 20