

BY-ELECTION CANDIDATE CONSIDERS CHARGES OVER 'DIG IN THE RIBS'

By Eamon Donoghue

FINE Gael TD Frank Feighan last night apologised for an incident during Enda Kenny's visit to Roscommon town yesterday.

Mr Feighan was allegedly involved in an attack on by-election candidate John McDermott.

Mr McDermott, from the Roscommon hospital action committee, told the Mail that he may be pressing charges after the alleged 'dig into the ribs' which has left him 'sore and shocked'.

Last night Mr Feighan said he regretted the move, which was caught by RTE camera crews.

'I misread the situation. I overreacted and I apologise,' he said.

Mr McDermott revealed to the Mail that he was elbowed by Mr Feighan whilst trying to ask the



Mr McDermott, left, and Mr Feighan, right

Taoiseach a question over previous promises about the maintenance of the A&E section in Roscommon Hospital.

Mr Kenny had arrived to canvass



Mr Feighan appears to use his elbow

with the party's candidate Maura Hopkins in the Roscommon South Leitrim by-election and was met by a mixture of supporters and a small group of protesters. Last



The two men both seem to take a stumble

night Mr McDermott told the Mail that he is 'sore and shocked, mainly shocked, I couldn't believe it happened.'

'I've sore ribs, but now I won't

be in A&E or anything.' He added: 'If you can't talk to a politician without being attacked, what does that say for democracy in this country.'

Pictures: COURTESY RTE

Now Taoiseach admits Seanad row is his fault

'I take responsibility for this,' says Kenny in spite of earlier claims

By Senan Molony and Fergal Blaney

ENDA Kenny was forced into an embarrassing climbdown yesterday, finally confessing that the Seanad bungling row was 'not my finest hour'.

And, while on Thursday, the Taoiseach brushed aside questions to do with the appointing of John McNulty to the board of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, just 24 hours later, he took full responsibility for the decision.

The appointment was seen as an effort to smooth Mr McNulty's path onto the Culture and Education Panel in the upcoming Seanad by-election on October 10.

And last night backbencher TD Seán Conlan, who shares a constituency with Arts Minister Heather Humphreys, was refusing to let the controversy die. He said that the Taoiseach had previously claimed twice that the appointment was made by Ms Humphreys and that both versions could not be correct.

Confronted by journalists in Boyle, Co. Roscommon, Mr Kenny said that Mr McNulty, was 'an innocent person in this'. He said: 'I wouldn't

'An outstanding candidate'

say it was my finest hour, and I take responsibility for this having evolved into what people might imagine it is.'

Asked if Mr McNulty should now withdraw from the race, Mr Kenny said: 'The legal advice is that you cannot stop the process. Mr McNulty is an outstanding candidate. I think he will do very well in the Senate. He is a person who understands the constituency and the region from which he comes.'

But Mr Conlan said a large number of members of the party were unhappy at the situation. 'There are questions to be asked of both the Taoiseach and the Arts Minister.'

'What the Taoiseach has said this evening makes matters worse, because the version of events he gave yesterday evening conflicts with this version. He said yesterday that the Minister for Arts was fully responsible for the appointment to the board. Now he is giving a different version of events and saying he is fully responsible for Mr McNulty's

Shatter: I haven't spoken to Enda since I resigned

FORMER Justice Minister Alan Shatter hasn't spoken to the Taoiseach since June, he revealed last night. Although he insisted that he wasn't going to get involved in 'sniping' against the Taoiseach on particular issues.

The deposed Cabinet heavyweight told Ryan Tubridy on The Late Late Show that he was adapting to being without a ministerial portfolio.

'I wasn't on the inside track when certain decisions were made. I also know that nobody's perfect. I've never been aware of a culture of fear within Fine Gael.'

He was given a modestly warm reception by the studio audience when he walked on set at six minutes to eleven. Dressed casually, without a tie, he denied he had been 'shafted by Enda Kenny', and denounced a preliminary clip of his career highlights as 'simplistic'. Mr Shatter said he met the

appointment to the board [of IMMA] and for his appointment to the Seanad. We do know that both of those versions of events can't be true. One of them is untrue.'

Mr Conlan went on: 'The minister should come out on live television and explain herself. The parliamentary party want to hold him [the Taoiseach] to account and will want answers at its next meeting.'



Tough talking: Ryan Tubridy tackles Alan Shatter on last night's Late Late Show

Picture: COURTESY RTE

Taoiseach at 9.15 in his office on the day Mr Kenny said he had the now famous report by Seán Guerin SC. Mr Kenny said that the way he dealt with the report could impact on the lifetime of the Government. It was over 300 pages.

He went to an event at Arbour Hill, returned to his office, and read 'portions' of the report and was 'very surprised to discover that it contained opinions and conclusions' on matters he had dealt with as a minister, when he had not been interviewed by the senior counsel.

Nonetheless, Mr Shatter said: 'Nobody would listen to what I had to say. We had been in weeks of media frenzy.'

He added: 'It would be very usual that a report would come in and

you would be expected to digested it within a few hours - but I was conscious of some political realities.' These included the proximity of the local and European elections.

'I concluded that if I didn't resign, we would have days of controversy that would impact on Fine Gael candidates across the country.' The Taoiseach accepted his resignation. 'I was obviously disappointed in the manner in which things developed.'

Mr Shatter said he was limited as to what he could say because he had brought a court challenge to the report's findings. He took Defence Forces questions on the day of his resignation, knowing his letter of departure was being drafted. He watched the Taoiseach

announce his resignation to the House. 'It wasn't a pleasant experience. It was disappointing - but unfortunately things happened in politics, and you can expect the unexpected.'

On the whistleblowing controversy, Mr Shatter said he couldn't assume allegations were true, although it was important the penalty points were administered with integrity. A Garda report found some claims, such as that people had died in traffic accidents as a result of leniency, were not substantiated. 'Of course I took it seriously,' he said.

He referred some of the excuses for cancelling fixed penalty notices as 'exotic' and said he referred them to the Garda Inspectorate.

Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin said: 'This begs a number of questions, the most obvious of which is, what exactly is he apologising for?'

'Is the Taoiseach now admitting he instructed Minister Heather Humphreys to appoint Mr McNulty in support of his Seanad candidacy?'

'This goes to the heart of the scandal and requires a full statement in Dáil Éireann from the Taoiseach.'

Senator Cáit Keane - a Dublin South West by-election hopeful - was also critical of the handling of the nomination.

She said: 'I do think it's having a damaging effect on the party.' She added: 'Maybe he [John McNulty] should look at it - maybe consider his position himself.'

However, Health Minister Leo Varadkar welcomed Mr Kenny's

comments in Boyle. He said: 'I really want to commend the Taoiseach on his remarks, his honesty and the fact that he's taken full responsibility for this controversy. Fine Gael is a party that's absolutely committed to new politics.'

But he added, one controversy like this can undo months and years of good work.'

senan.molony@dailymail.ie