

THE Irish Mirror today brings you the first in a series of columns by women in politics.

Over the coming weeks female TDs and Senators will give a first-hand insight into life in the corridors of power at one of the most difficult points in this country's history.

They will outline the daily challenges facing them in the Dail and Seanad and their battle to change Irish life for the better.

The first instalment is written by Dublin North East Fianna Fail Education and Skills spokeswoman Senator Averil Power.

### FIANNA FAIL'S ALTERNATIVE BUDGET 2013

THIS week the Government will publish Budget 2013 and there are indications the less well-off will again be targeted for harsh cuts and extra charges.

To show there is a fairer way, Fianna Fail published our own alternative Budget last week.

Our proposals would meet the targets set by the Troika while avoiding the imposition of a property tax and protecting vital services such as education, supports for people with disabilities and mental health services.

We believe investment in education is the key to economic growth and that short-term cuts will cost far more in the long run.

As the party's Seanad education spokesperson, I am glad our Budget shows how savings can be made elsewhere so that education can be protected.

### YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

I RECENTLY published a national strategy for promoting positive youth mental health through the education system.

Up to one in four students at any given time experience psychological problems.

The triggers include bullying, relationship problems, exam pressures, difficulties coming to terms with their sexual orientation or depression.

The causes are varied but the effect on young people is often the same - a feeling of stress, isolation and hopelessness.

The fact Ireland's youth suicide rate is now the fourth highest in Europe clearly shows we are not doing nearly enough to help our young people to cope with such problems.

Fianna Fail believes that, together with parents, schools can play a major role in promoting positive mental health and equipping young people with coping skills.

Our proposals are designed to help them to do this. They include training for teachers, positive mental health campaigns, anti-bullying initiatives, peer-mentoring programmes and greater access to specialised services where needed.

### WOMEN'S AID 16 DAYS CAMPAIGN

I AM proud to support the Women's Aid 16 Days Of Action Campaign which runs until December 10.

The drive aims to educate people about domestic violence and encourage victims to seek help.

It is estimated 213,000 women in Ireland are living with abusive husbands or partners.

This time of year can be particularly tough. While most families

# Our youth suicide rate is the 4th highest in Europe..it shows we're not doing enough



you need help or would just like to learn more about Women's Aid visit [www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie).

### OIREACHTAS FASHION SHOW

LAST week I was taken well outside my comfort zone when myself and 25 other TDs and Senators modelled in the Oireachtas charity fashion show.

I'm pretty certain none of us will be getting called up by an agency any time soon, but the night was great fun and raised a lot of money for the Motor Neurone Disease Association.

It was organised by Minister Jimmy Deenihan and Deputy Nicky McFadden, who has been diagnosed with the condition herself.

It was also an opportunity to promote Irish designers and Irish businesses, including the Secret Closet in Howth which supplied my gorgeous "nearly new" Ben De Lisi dress, above.

My next charity challenge is competing in a White Collar Boxing Competition between Suttonians RFC and the Dublin Airport Authority after Christmas - a far less scary venture than modelling!



### PROPERTY TAX - WRONG PLAN, WRONG TIME

IT is now clearer than ever that the Government's property tax proposals are the wrong plan at the wrong time.

No one disputes the need to tax wealth but in the current environment the value of many people's homes bears absolutely no relation to their income.

Thousands of families are in negative equity or struggling to pay mortgages as a result of reduced earnings or unemployment. The Government has tried to avoid taking responsibility for their proposals by shifting the blame onto the Troika.

But last month EU-IMF again reiterated that while the gap between State income and expenditure must be closed the Government has choices about how it does so.

Fianna Fail outlined other options in its Alternative Budget last week.

Sadly though I fear Ministers Michael Noonan and Phil Hogan, above, are not for turning on this one, regardless of the added pressure it will put on families already struggling.



### BADLY BEHAVED TDs!

ON Wednesday, I welcomed a CSPE (Civic, Social and Political Education) class from Portmarnock Community School to the Oireachtas and answered their questions about politics.

It is important for young people to have the opportunity to see their parliament in action and to understand the value of the vote that they will soon be eligible to cast.

Though some of them did remark the shouting and bad behaviour they