

6/02/2008

**Government must not conspire to use taxpayers' money to get a
'yes' vote**

Patricia McKenna has accused the Government of planning to use taxpayers' money to influence public opinion in the run-up to the forthcoming referendum on the Lisbon Treaty.

During question time in the Dáil today, Minister Dermot Ahern said 'we have received strong advice from the Attorney General that the McKenna judgement does not kick into place until the legislation (i.e. Referendum Bill) is passed and signed by the President'.

Ms. McKenna has called on the Government to publish the advice of the Attorney General: 'If the Government is unwilling to publish this advice then it should at the very least state clearly what it believes the exact legal position is with regard to the use of public monies in the forthcoming referendum'.

'The Ministers words would indicate that the Government plan to abuse their position and circumvent the principles of the McKenna judgement by delaying calling the referendum until such time as they have influenced people to support the Lisbon Treaty. I believe this would be a clear breach of the McKenna judgement and that regardless of whether the actual date is set the principles established by the Supreme Court still stand and must be respected.

In particular that public money cannot be used to persuade people to vote in a particular way.’

‘I have already begun seeking legal advice on this matter and legal action may have to be taken, in the national interests, to ensure that the Government does not breach its Constitutional responsibilities. If the Government intend to engage in an advocacy campaign, with the use of public money, prior to the calling of the referendum then they are, I believe, in breach of the Supreme Court ruling. The lack of criticism on this issue would indicate that is a political conspiracy between all of the political parties on the Yes-side in the Dáil to deny the public a fair and balanced referendum campaign. Regardless of which side people are on in this campaign, I would appeal to them to defend the constitutional right of Irish citizens to make up their own minds without their own money being used to convince them to vote in a particular way.’

[ENDS]

For further Information:

Patricia McKenna (Chairperson) – 087 2427049

Frank Keoghan (Secretary) – 087 2308330

