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# Head Shop protestors take fight to the Dail

■ Seamus Duke

A bus carrying representatives of the Roscommon Anti-Head Shop Group travelled to Dublin on Wednesday to meet with Oireachtas members at Dail Eireann to highlight their campaign against the proliferation of Head Shops in towns all around the country.

There were also protestors present from areas such as Drogheda, Arklow, Bray and Athlone, but the delegation from Roscommon was by far the largest. Fine Gael Cllr. Domnick Connolly, Vice Chairman of the Roscommon Anti-Head Shops Group and PRO

Jacqui Snype led the 30-strong delegation in the absence of the chairperson Michael Earley and Cllr. Connolly expressed himself very pleased with the response that they received.

"We met TDs and Senators from all parties and there is genuine support for our cause and we are confident that we can get something done. We met with Fine Gael spokesperson for Health Dr. James Reilly and he promised to raise this matter by way of a parliamentary question. Deputy Denis Naughten and Senator Terry Leyden were also there and we met representatives from Labour and Sinn Fein as well.

"We are awaiting a concrete response from the government as to what they are going to do but we know that there will be action on this in the long-term. We were there to highlight our case and we feel that we are making an impact. There are a number of things that we can do and we will be discussing them over the next few days and weeks. There were people from other towns there too and we felt that the trip to Leinster House was very worthwhile indeed" he concluded.

Meanwhile Fine Gael TD Frank Feighan met the deputation and accompanied them to meet his party's health spokesperson, Dr.

James Reilly. Deputy Feighan said after the meeting that "I am full of admiration for the protestors in Roscommon. The Government have not done nearly enough in this regard. It is easy to announce that you are banning certain products but much more needs to be done in this regard."

Deputy Feighan continued: "The people of Roscommon have led the way in this protest and we need to take a serious look at this whole problem. Our spokesperson Dr. James Reilly is fully aware of this problem and when we get into government we will be addressing this issue as a matter of urgency."

## CE scheme vacancies

Clonberne Community Development, Co. Galway, has been granted a new FAS CE Scheme. It is due to commence in April 2010. Four vacancies have arisen, two for general operatives for maintenance and general upkeep of the area and two for day care workers with the elderly. Any person interested should telephone Aine Hennelly at the Clonberne Resource Office on (093) 45126 or Martin Hennelly on (093) 45126. FAS Criteria applies. The Committee would like to thank FAS for their continued support.

## Confidential helpline

CLUAS Call Listening, Understanding and Signposting Service, is a private and confidential phone line service for any individual who is experiencing stress or low mood, or who is unusually worried and in need of someone to talk to. CLUAS is for anyone living in County Roscommon who is experiencing difficulties and unhappiness in their lives. The focus is to provide a listening ear and information at an early stage and prevent problems escalating. Trained volunteers operate the confidential service. It is opened Friday evenings between 7 pm to 10 pm. Lo Call 1850 588 599.

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Roscommon protestors pictured outside The Dail on Wednesday. Pic: Tom Szustek.

## 'Ghetto' warning at Council briefing

■ Pauline Scott

Members of the Roscommon Anti-Headshop group addressed members of Roscommon County Council at Monday's meeting of the council.

Members of the group were welcomed to the meeting by Cllr. Domnick Connolly and Mayor Tony Ward. Jacqui Snype told councillors at the meeting that the group wanted to express their dismay at the opening of a shop in Roscommon selling drugs. She said that the group has received messages of support from communities in Sweden, Australia and the US and has kept the issue alive by maintaining an eight-week peaceful protest outside the shop at Castle Street. The group also met with the landlord's legal representative, as well as the local Garda Superintendent and Minister Michael Finneran.

Ms. Snype said that the group wants all

consumable products in the headshops withdrawn immediately until they are properly licensed. She demanded that the Government take action to close these shops, and stated that people had died after taking legal highs and many people had also been hospitalised. She asked members of Roscommon County Council to take a lead on the issue, saying that otherwise a rise in criminality would result, as well as greater anxiety for parents.

Mayor Tony Ward told the council that he has written to the Minister for Health and the Minister for Justice about the matter. Chairman of the Roscommon Anti Headshop Group, Michael Earley, told the council that he has lived and worked all his life in Roscommon. "It's a great place to rear your children and I see the opening of the head shop affecting that. We have seen the town improving, with a new swimming pool, the development in the Square and the really outstanding thing

that has been created is the park and I would hate to see something as valuable as the park turning into a ghetto and that is what will happen."

"Kids can go into town and you had no fears for their safety. At a recent awareness meeting in a local school, a sergeant was asked how bad the situation was in Roscommon and he said 'In Roscommon the fight is not lost yet.' The 'yet' part of that is what concerns me. It is possible to lose Roscommon, or if we have the will, to save Roscommon."

All of the councillors who spoke, with the exception of Cllr. Luke 'Ming' Flanagan, spoke in support of the Anti-Headshop group and praised the courage of the members involved. Cllr. Flanagan said, "My opinion is that it is futile to close down these shops" and he added that since the public meeting held in Gleeson's, a minimum of 200 people have died as a direct result of alcohol.