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**Irish Independent**

## Battle of sexes could see women TDs take on new 'Minister for Men'

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THE by-elections became a battle of the sexes yesterday as Tanaiste Mary Harney called on voters to make history by electing two new women TDs, while a Meath independent demanded a new Minister for Men.

Progressive Democrats leader Mary Harney joined the campaign trail in Kilcock, to pose with her party's Meath hopeful, Sirena Campbell, and North Kildare candidate Kate Walsh.

The PDs have a fondness for choosing locations with meaningful names - they kicked off their last general election campaign in Prosperous - but stressed the only reason Kilcock was chosen yesterday was because of its picturesque bridge straddling the two constituencies.

Ms Harney said that if either of their candidates was elected, it would make the PDs the first party in the history of the State with more female than male TDs, and push women's representation in the Dail above its current "sub-Saharan level" of 14pc.

"I'd never advocate voting for a woman just because she's a woman, but we are putting forward two strong, articulate and dedicated community activists," she said in advance of International Women's Day today.

However, despite the statistics, Meath candidate Liam O'Gogain was having none of it - the fathers' rights campaigner was mad as hell and he wasn't going to take it any more.

Men and boys were treated as second-class citizens in Irish society today and the male perspective was now excluded from policy making, he said, calling for a Minister for Men to redress the balance.

"Men contribute the greater proportion of taxes in Ireland and yet their human needs are disregarded," he said, citing male suicide rates, fatherless families and high road accident levels. "If women in Irish society were treated in a similar vein, then there would be calls for public inquiries and tribunals into this disgraceful treatment of one half of the Irish population," he said.

Power or the lack of it was also an issue for the Fine Gael camp, with candidate Shane McEntee on the warpath over power cuts that continued to plague the Meath area.

A power cut in Batterstown during his canvass left pubs, homes and businesses without electricity for what Martin Kearney of Caffrey's pub said was the fourth or fifth time since Christmas.

Shane McEntee said power cuts were becoming more and more frequent in Dunshaughlin and Ratoath - further victims of the area's rapid expansion that has put roads, schools and even water supplies under extreme pressure.

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"You have premises in darkness, pubs and restaurants that can't prepare meals because they have no power - it's all to do with the pressure on infrastructure that hasn't been addressed," he said.

Joining the canvas, MEP Mairead McGuinness said she had been touched by some of the selfless stories and requests she had met on the election trail.

Gerry Wall from Dunboyne had asked her to appeal to people to carry organ-donor cards. A good friend of his is waiting for a heart transplant which has been delayed because of a drop-off in donations due to the organ retention scandals.

### Aideen Sheehan

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