

Senator Geraldine Feeney

Fianna Fail

After almost five years in the Seanad, Senator Geraldine Feeney is looking forward to the forthcoming house elections to continue her representation of Defence Forces' issues following her nomination to the Seanad by the ICPSA in 2002.

In her time as a Senator, Geraldine has been the Fianna Fail spokesperson on health and children, has sat on the child protection committee and the committee on health and children. She has also been elected to the Fianna Fail ard comhairle.

She is keen, however, to reinforce her commitment to representing defence related issues in the Seanad and honouring the trust placed in her by RACO and other representative organisations. "The nomination of the defence forces' representative organisations, and my relationship with them, is something which I am very proud to represent and I look forward to working with them well into the future after the next election."

The Senator's connection to the Defence Forces' came via Sligo Town and she built up a strong connection with military personnel which have strengthened since she took her seat in the Seanad. "I do keep a watching brief on defence related matters. I sat in and debated the main 2 pieces of legislation that have been through in my 5 years in Seanad Eireann. The first was the 2000 White Paper on Defence, and I can say that the Defence Forces can be immensely proud of themselves for what they have achieved and are a model for the rest of the public service. I think what has come out of this is there is more money for modern equipment and training. I am delighted to see for the first time ever we have a budget of €1 billion for the Dept of Defence. 70% goes on wages and 30% goes on training. The argument will be made that it is not an awful lot compared to where we were 6 or 7 years ago. However, I spoke to Willie O'Dea and he is very upbeat about the whole department and tells me that very shortly we will be taking possession of 3 new Naval Vessels."

From the perspective of the Defence Forces' promoting their work to the public, the Senator points to last year's 1916 commemorative parade as a resounding success. "I think the commemorative parade for 1916 last year was a tremendous success and it highlighted the respect that the people have for the organisation. They are people who go about their work in an coordinated, diligent manner and I believe that they are greatly respected for it." From a personal point of view, Geraldine adds that she is hugely impressed with the increase in female involvement to approximately 7% within the Officer ranks and rising to 15% to 20% in the organisation as a whole. On the issue of the reforms of the complaints and disciplinary apparatus within the force, Geraldine points to the establishment of the Ombudsman's Office as a very important step, having met with Paulyn Marrinan Quinn. "I am impressed with her work. Also, recently, we saw the Defence Forces Amendment bill go through, all about disciplinary and I think it brought a level of fairness and



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transparency that was much needed. It is almost like a complete overhaul of the military regulation and law, now it successfully went through the Dail but there were some minor amendments but it is ready to now be passed into law. I was glad to see this legislation go through as both military representative bodies were calling for this. When I spoke to the Minister last weekend there was a very small section he couldn't bring in for genuine reasons as he wanted to pass the bill before the general election but there is a small section not ready and it will be brought before the house in the autumn. Again there will be consultation with the representative groups.”