Minister O'Dea slams Noonan's attitude to health

By ALAN JACQUES

MINISTER of State, Willie O'Dea slammed Fine Gael leader Michael Noonan for hijacking health issues as a ticket to Government.

During a Private Members' motion in the Dail last week Mr O'Dea accused Fine Gael of turning the health issue into a political football match in the run up to the next General Election. The Minister labelled their health policy as a "manipulative, cynical and downright fraudulent" attempt to buy votes.

"The Fine Gael Party and its leader, Michael Noonan, see health policy as a ticket to Merrion Street, not as a mechanism to improve the health system. This is a textbook example of trying to take the low road to high office," said Minister O'Dea.

"I have constituents in desperate need of medical treatment and who have been failed disgracefully by the health system. At least I can say I am part of a Government which is making a change and that has begun to turn the tide," he said.

Minister O'Dea described the health section of Fine Gael's manifesto as being worthy of "Alice in Wonderland". He added that the novelist Lewis Carroll will never be dead while Fine Gael's spokesperson on health Gay Mitchell lives.

"The health service is not a bed of roses, but it is improving. It was not until June 1997 when Fine Gael and the Labour Party were ejected from office that reform at last began. Since that time the health spend has doubled from £2.5 billion to £5 billion."

"Since 1997 waiting lists have been cut by 4,100 and the number of nurse training places has been increased by one third. The number of procedures carried out in hospitals has been increased by 90,000 per annum. These are the facts. Why was none of this done when the Fine Gael Party was in Government?" said Minister O'Dea.