

Seán Gallagher made it clear last October that he would not challenge the outcome of the Presidential Election, and he offered his full support to President Michael D. Higgins.

The revelations in today's *Sunday Independent* regarding RTE's Frontline Presidential Debate are deeply disturbing. This information, which has come to light since the BAI ruling last week relating to the Frontline programme and its production staff, raises the most fundamental questions about the trustworthiness and impartiality of our national broadcaster. Trust in RTÉ is at the core of our democracy. That trust has again been brought into serious question.

Tomorrow Mr Gallagher will be communicating directly with the Minister for Communications. As of this morning, he has instructed his legal team to examine these disturbing revelations.

The revelations in this morning's *Sunday Independent* are by Frontline audience member Pat McGuirk, who says that RTÉ changed his submitted question and rehearsed him prior to the debate. These revelations are gravely alarming.

RTÉ is required by law to be independent, impartial, neutral and fair. RTÉ failed to reach this standard in the Frontline programme. RTÉ has failed to justify the confidence expressed only last week by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland that in contravening their duty of fairness towards Seán Gallagher in the crucial Frontline presidential debate of 24th October, 2011, RTÉ's errors were not the result of *male fides*, bad faith.

There are many unanswered questions about the programme. RTÉ boasted that the Frontline programme could be a "game changer". It now seems that RTÉ's production staff were working towards setting the agenda, rather than facilitating a debate between the audience and the candidates. The presenter has publicly claimed that he was unaware that the bogus tweet, which he introduced into the programme some 15 minutes after it was received, was almost immediately called into question by the Martin McGuinness campaign team. He failed to refer to it in remaining 26 minutes of the live Frontline broadcast, or again in his radio programme the following day. Who made the decision to keep the presenter unaware of the corrective tweet during the live broadcast, and again during the following day's radio programme? Did RTÉ set the agenda in a presidential debate staged as a debate between the candidates and the audience? Who makes these decisions within RTÉ? These are serious questions, and they need to be addressed by RTÉ.

Ultimately the issue is whether RTÉ compromised the democratic process. This is not about Seán Gallagher, but about the journalistic standards that should apply to our national service provider, and ensuring that future candidates do not face unfair journalistic practices..

RTÉ cannot now disregard the calls for a full and proper public inquiry relating to the production and airing of the Frontline programme. All records relating to the programme must be disclosed in a public arena, and every member of the production team must make him or herself available for questioning in the appropriate, independent, forum. RTÉ have a case to answer.