

## REPLY REGARDING LOBBYING BILL – SENT VIA EMAIL ON 4 SEPT 2013

Dear Resident

Thank you for your email in connection with your concerns regarding Part 2 of the Government's Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill.

Please be assured that I share your concerns about this piece of legislation. This Government Bill is a sinister gag on charities and campaigners. It is clear that the Government is rushing this legislation through Parliament in a cynical attempt to insulate their record and their policies from legitimate, democratic criticism ahead of the next election. I fear this Bill will have a chilling effect on the quality of our national debate.

There has been no consultation on this Bill and it has come under sustained criticism from political and constitutional experts and the voluntary sector. The Electoral Commission has stated that "the Bill creates significant regulatory uncertainty for large and small organisations that campaign on, or even discuss, public policy issues in the year before the next general election, and imposes significant new burdens on such organisations".

As you may know, the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill had its Second Reading in the House of Commons yesterday. As Deputy Speaker I chaired some of this very interesting and lengthy debate during which many Labour MPs spoke against the Government's proposals. During yesterday's debate, Angela Eagle MP, Labour's Shadow Leader of the House, tabled the following amendment to the Bill:

*"this House affirms its belief in the need for greater transparency in the lobbying industry and in British politics, and considers that there should be a universal register of all professional lobbyists backed by a code of conduct and sanctions, clear rules on third party campaigning, and real reform to get the big money out of politics; but declines to give a Second Reading to the Transparency of Lobbying, Third Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill because the proposals on lobbying cover only a tiny minority of the industry and will make lobbying less transparent, and the proposals on third party campaigning amount to a gag on charities and campaigners who have a democratic right to participate in important debates in the run up to elections; and strongly believes that the publication of such a Bill should have been preceded by a full process of pre-legislative scrutiny and consultation with affected parties."*

Unfortunately the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats did not support our amendment and when it came to the Second Reading vote Labour MPs voted against the Bill but the Government used its majority to win the vote by 309 votes to 247. The Bill now proceeds to its Committee Stage in the House of Commons.

I strongly believe that the Government must go back to the drawing board with this Bill and instead come forward with proposals for genuine reform. I can assure you that Labour will continue to oppose the Bill in its current form.

I hope this reply is helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further concerns regarding this or any other matter.

Yours sincerely

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Labour MP for Bristol South

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I may contact you with further information on this and other issues. If you would prefer not to receive these updates, please write to me at the above address.