



Alan Campbell MP Weekly Update

Friday 3rd March 2017



Commons News

Bus Services Bill

On Wednesday the Bus Services Bill was debated in the House of Commons.

In the mid-1980s the Government deregulated the bus industry across Britain, except in London. From almost the moment deregulation was introduced there have been calls to reregulate it. The Bill offers a step back from the problems created 30 years ago, offering an extension of the system that has worked well in London since then. I support the changes because they are a step forward and provide the opportunity of improving services for passengers. However, I also know the risks of competition, and so I want to see strong safeguards, particularly in protecting workers from suffering a race to the bottom.

I believe that local authorities all over the country need and deserve greater control over their bus services. I therefore believe powers to re-regulate local bus services should be available to all areas that want them, not just to combined authorities with an elected mayor. The Bill started its passage through Parliament in the House of Lords and was improved there. I support the Bill and was pleased to see it pass its Second Reading on Wednesday. I hope it now goes on to be further improved in its Committee Stage.

NHS Shared business services

On Monday the Shadow Health Secretary asked the Government to make a statement on the loss of confidential NHS patient correspondence by NHS Shared Business Services (SBS). The Health Secretary confirmed that the company failed to deliver more than 700,000 patient letters between 2011 and 2016. £2.2 million has been spent so far on getting GPs to look through the returned correspondence.

The Department of Health knew about this issue in March last year, but Parliament was not told until July. I believe that once the enquiry into this is finally completed the Health Secretary should update the House of Commons on the full cost and impact for patients, and explain what measures will be put in place to make sure an incident like this never happens again.

Health and Social Care Funding

On Monday there was an Estimates Day debate on Health and Social Care. The NHS and social care are facing significant financial challenges as a consequence of an ageing and growing population. The NHS is required to find £22 billion of annual efficiency savings by 2020-21 and there are concerns that increasing demand for health services and pressure on council budgets are threatening the financial stability and sustainability of the health and social care systems.

In November 2016 independent health charities reported a net deficit of £2.5 billion for NHS trusts in 2015-16. They also said that six years of “unprecedented” budget reductions have led to a 26% fall in the number of people aged over 65 accessing publicly funded social care, which is causing significant financial costs for older people, their families and carers, and is exacerbating pressures on the NHS.

Since 2010, the number of people waiting longer than four hours in A&E has risen. Last year 1.8 million people waited four hours or longer in A&E compared to just over 350,000 in 2009-10. Long waits for emergency admissions were also 58% higher in 2016 than in 2015, and five times higher than 2011.

The Government's Productivity Plan

On Tuesday there was an Estimates Day debate on the Government's Productivity Plan.

In January 2016, the former Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee published its report on the Government's Productivity Plan. The Government responded to the report in December 2016.

The Committee welcomed the Government's focus on the issue of productivity, but raised concerns that the document did not have "clear, measurable objectives" to enable it to be called a plan. I share these concerns and believe that the Government's plan lacks a strategic vision to tackle the root causes of our productivity crisis.

Productivity is therefore one of the most important challenges facing our economy. However, I am concerned that the National Productivity Investment Fund of £27 billion over 5 years, which was announced at Autumn Statement in 2016, is nowhere near the scale of what is needed.

Productivity is a major driver of wages and without significant improvement, securing sustained pay increases will be difficult and working household incomes will still not have risen to pre-2008 levels by 2021 in a lost decade for wages.

Intergenerational Fairness

On Tuesday there was an Estimates Day debate on intergenerational fairness.

In November 2016, the Work and Pensions Select Committee published a report on intergenerational fairness which concluded that the economy has been skewed toward baby boomers and against millennials.

I agree with the premise of the Select Committee's report – which is that we need to tackle the intergenerational inequality that exists across the country. However, I believe that there should be different policy solutions to the ones set out in the report.

I believe that it is important that every older person has dignity and security in retirement. I am therefore pleased that the Opposition has guaranteed that it will retain the triple lock and pensioner benefits over the course of the next parliament.

Personal Independence Payments

On Tuesday the Work and Pensions Secretary was asked to make a statement on the cuts to entitlement to Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

PIP helps disabled people to fund their living costs, including the additional costs that they face because of their condition.

Last week, the Government issued new regulations to clarify the criteria used in assessing eligibility for PIP. The regulations followed tribunal rulings, which allowed chronic "psychological distress" to be included in the PIP assessment. The Government has stated the regulations will restore the original aim of the benefit.

I am concerned that the new regulations, which will come into force in just over two weeks' time, were issued without any consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee.

The regulations will reduce eligibility to PIP support for over 164,000 people with debilitating mental health conditions. I believe that the Government's actions are undermining the judicial process and I am concerned about the effects the regulations will have on the health and wellbeing of the people affected.

Next Week

Monday: Vehicle Technology and Aviation Bill (Second Reading)

Wednesday: Budget 2017

Thursday: Continuation of Budget Debate (Day 2)

Contact Alan

www.alancampbellmp.co.uk
campbellal@parliament.uk
[@alancampbellmp](https://twitter.com/alancampbellmp)
0191 2571927