



Alan Campbell MP Weekly Update

Friday 20th October 2017



Commons News

Universal Credit Roll-out (Opposition Day Debate)

On Wednesday, the House of Commons debated an Opposition motion calling for the Government to pause the roll-out of Universal Credit (UC) full service.

UC was first introduced in 2012, with the aim of simplifying the social security system and making work pay.

While I support the original aims of UC, however, I am concerned that a number of serious design flaws with the system are pushing people into debt, rent arrears and even homelessness. For example, new claimants must wait six weeks before they receive any support, while one in four do not even receive support within this deadline. Furthermore, Government changes to the social security system have resulted in a net reduction of support for people with health conditions and disabilities. This cannot continue.

There is a growing body of evidence of the negative impact of UC. The National Housing Federation estimates around 80% of tenants on UC are in rent arrears, and the Trussell Trust has reported that referrals for emergency food parcels are significantly higher in UC areas while analysis from the Child Poverty Action Group has concluded UC will push a million more children into poverty by 2020.

I believe we must work together to avert the disaster that will unfold if UC is rolled out without fixing its current design faults. The House of Commons voted 299 to 0 to pause the roll out of UC. As the Government was intending to avoid a vote, I shouted 'No' and acted as a teller in order to force a named vote to put further pressure on the Government.

The Government should now make clear how it will implement this decision and pause the roll-out.

EU Exit Negotiations (Government Statement)

On Tuesday, the Brexit Secretary gave MPs an update following the latest round of the UK's exit negotiations with the European Union.

This was the last round of negotiations before the October meeting of the EU Council, which was expected to mark the conclusion of the first phase. However, the Government failed to hit this very important target, meaning continued uncertainty for EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in the EU, no agreement on Northern Ireland, and deadlock on the financial settlement.

This is a serious failure. It means discussions about trade talks and our future relationship are delayed until December at the earliest, and the chances of us crashing out of the EU with no deal are raised. Every passing week without progress on transitional arrangements also makes things worse for businesses and puts investment in our economy at risk.

Both sides must redouble their efforts to break the impasse and ensure there is no delay in progressing to the main part of the negotiations. It has taken the Government months to get to this point and I am worried about its ability to deliver the Brexit deal our country needs to protect jobs, the economy and rights.

International Investment (Government Statement)

On Tuesday, the Business Secretary made a statement on international investment.

The Business Secretary said on Tuesday that the Government proposed to lower the threshold for Government intervention in mergers involving companies in the dual use and military sectors, as well as parts of the advanced technology sector. The Government is also consulting on proposals to broaden the range of transactions that it can review for security purposes and to introduce mandatory notification of foreign investment in parts of the economy that are critical for national security.

I welcome the Government's proposals on scrutiny of foreign investment. However, in the last year, we have seen a number of mergers that call into question the adequacy of our merger regime to defend vital economic interests. I am concerned both that it has taken so long for the Government to come forward with these plans and that it is not clear how they would have helped in many of the mergers that have already taken place. The Government needs to make clear that it will take the further action that is desperately needed on this issue.

The Business Secretary also highlighted in his statement the announcement from Bombardier and Airbus of a joint venture involving the C-series aircraft. He stated that the announcement offered the potential to protect the interests of Bombardier's workers in Belfast and throughout its UK supply chain.

I also welcome the partnership between Bombardier and Airbus. The pairing of two cutting edge product lines is exciting for the future of aerospace manufacturing. However, it should not be an excuse for the Government to do less to ensure that the unfair tariffs imposed on Bombardier in the United States are dropped.

Nuclear Safeguards Bill (Second Reading)

On Monday, the House of Commons considered the Nuclear Safeguards Bill. The Bill aims to ensure that when the UK is no longer a member of the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), we will have in place a legal framework that meets our international obligations on the safeguarding of civil nuclear material.

The Business Secretary said on Monday that the Nuclear Safeguards Bill was a contingency measure. He stated that the Government wanted to see maximum continuity in the UK's relationship with Euratom, but that this would depend on negotiations with Euratom. However, we have not yet left Euratom and it is not clear whether doing so is a necessary part of leaving the European Union. That we are considering this Bill at all is due to the Prime Minister's reckless and ideological decision to include Euratom in her letter informing the European Commission of the UK's intention to leave the EU.

I am also concerned at its limited scope. Safeguarding arrangements are only one part of what is at risk if the UK leaves Euratom, yet the Bill fails to address many of the key issues that the Government itself identified as important in its position paper on this issue. It is also worrying that the Bill gives the Government significant powers to amend the UK's nuclear safeguarding procedures without Parliamentary approval.

I believe we should aim for continued participation in Euratom, or as close a relationship with it as possible. Nevertheless, if the worst comes to the worst and we do crash out of the organisation without an agreement, it is vital that we have a nuclear safeguarding regime in place. I therefore did not oppose the Nuclear Safeguards Bill on Monday. However, I hope to see substantial amendments to it as it proceeds through Parliament.

Retail Energy (Government Statement)

On Thursday, there was a Backbench Business debate in the House of Commons on the Government's tobacco control plan.

The control of the sale and use of tobacco is an important public health matter not only for those individuals who use it but for all around them. After 18 months of delays, the Government published its updated plan for England on this issue in July. I welcome the plan, which sets out a bold ambition to achieve a smoke-free generation by 2022. However, I remain concerned that cuts to public health funding have meant that it has proven far more difficult for local authorities to provide the much-needed specialist support.

The King's Fund has said that public health cuts will reach £800 million in the five years to 2021, and in 2017-18 alone local authority spending for tobacco control faces cuts of 30%. A study by the health charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) also found that a growing number of local authorities no longer have a specialist stop smoking service.

I believe that cuts to public health grants are a false economy when it comes to seriously driving forward the agenda on public health, especially in relation to smoking. The new tobacco control plan can only be effective if the right level of funding is found to implement it and by ending cuts to public health budgets.

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The Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Bill



I was in Parliament today to support a Private Members Bill - The Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Bill. The Bill proposes to introduce new offences protecting all emergency service workers, including those who currently do not have the same protections that others do such as NHS workers.

Indeed, while there were 24,000 assaults on police officers across England and Wales last year, there were also over 70,000 reported physical assaults against NHS staff in 2015/16. I therefore believe it is right that they receive better legal protection and I back calls for a change in the law.

Our emergency service workers do a brilliant job and their safety must be paramount. I also believe they must be paid properly for the essential work that they do and this is why I am committed to continuing to press the Government to lift its cap on public sector pay.

The Government have signalled its support for the Bill which passed without division.