



Alan Campbell MP Weekly Update

Friday 9th March 2018



Commons News

UK/EU Future Economic Partnership (Government Statement)

On Monday, the Prime Minister made a statement in the House of Commons on the UK's future economic partnership with the European Union.

The Prime Minister said that she wanted the UK's future relationship with the EU to protect people's jobs and security. She reaffirmed the Government's commitment to leaving the Single Market and the Customs Union and conceded that "our access to each other's markets will be less than it is now".

The Prime Minister also reiterated that a fundamental principle of the Government's negotiating strategy is that trade at the UK-EU border should be as frictionless as possible, with no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Additionally, the Prime Minister said that the Government wants to explore the terms on which the UK could remain part of EU agencies. She explained that this would mean abiding by the rules of those agencies, making an appropriate financial contribution, and having respect for the remit of the ECJ.

Twenty months have passed since the referendum and it has been over a year since Article 50 was triggered. We have heard speech after speech, yet the Prime Minister still cannot bring clarity to the negotiations or certainty for British businesses and workers.

I believe the Prime Minister has failed to deliver any clear and credible solution to the problems we face and I worried that the Government's strategy is putting our jobs and manufacturing industries at risk.

The Brexit Secretary has previously told the House of Commons that the Government would secure a deal that delivers the "exact same benefits" of the Single Market and Customs Union. Now, the Prime Minister is merely saying that she wants "good access" to EU markets. On the crucial issue of Northern Ireland, the Prime Minister is still to offer a real solution.

I believe it is possible to retain the benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union, but that requires an alternative approach – one that can unite the country and put jobs and living standards first. This must include negotiating a new and strong relationship with the Single Market and a comprehensive UK-EU Customs Union, in which the UK would have a say in future trade deals negotiated with the EU.

The Prime Minister must deal with the divisions in the Government, end the uncertainty and deliver the Brexit deal we need to protect jobs and the economy.

National Planning Policy Framework (Government Statement)

On Monday, the Government made a statement on reforms to the national planning policy framework.

The Government outlined a series of proposals with the aim of accelerating housebuilding, including: a standardised approach to assessing housing need; more flexibility to develop brownfield land in the green belt; and a review of the planning appeal inquiries process.

New house building rates have, for many years, been only half of what is required, and nowhere near the 300,000 homes needed to keep pace with demand.

Planning needs to deliver not only new homes, but new communities. It should be about designing places in which people want to live and work where there are environmental and leisure amenities, and where quality of life is high on the agenda.

I am concerned that the Government's proposal to strip councils of their right to decide where development takes place is unhelpful and misguided - the reality is that councils are approving nine in 10 planning applications, which shows that the planning system is not a barrier to building.

More widely, I believe the Government has no plan to fix the housing crisis: home-ownership has fallen to a thirty-year low; rough sleeping has more than doubled; and the number of new homes built for social rent has fallen to its lowest level.

Armed Forces Covenant: Northern Ireland (Opposition Day Debate)

On Wednesday, the House of Commons debated a motion put forward by the DUP to recognise the valuable contribution made by men and women from Northern Ireland to our armed forces and to reaffirm the commitment to ensuring the armed forces covenant is fully implemented in Northern Ireland.

The armed forces covenant is an important part of a way in which we acknowledge the service and sacrifice of members of our armed forces not just in Northern Ireland but around the world.

I am 100% in favour of the armed forces covenant. It is an excellent measure, building on the initial military covenant passed in 2000.

The Minister for the Armed Forces said on Wednesday that the Government is determined to ensure that the armed forces have the support that they need, from whatever part of the UK that they come from.

The armed forces covenant has been adopted in Northern Ireland and I believe that it should be fully implemented.

Data Protection Bill (Second Reading)

On Monday, the Data Protection Bill was debated in the House of Commons. It aims to update the UK's data protection regime in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation, due to come into force in May.

It is an important Bill because businesses, individuals, Government agencies and others need to exchange and process data, but to do that safely, we need proper protections so that it cannot be stolen, used without our consent or misused. I think the Government should take a much more wide-ranging, comprehensive approach to this than they have taken with the Data Protection Bill.

I did not oppose the Bill's progress on Monday, and it passed Second Reading. However, I hope changes will be made as the Bill undergoes detailed scrutiny over the coming weeks.

We need a statutory code of enforceable rights offering people proper control over their own data, appropriate remedies when their data is misused and proportionate sanctions to deter unlawful data processing.

A right of privacy is key, and article 8 of the charter of fundamental rights should be incorporated into the Bill.

I am concerned that the Bill currently exempts immigration officials from data protection obligations that are important for ensuring that newcomers have the right to access information that is essential to a fair and due process. I believe this exemption should be deleted from the Bill.

It is vital that children are at the core of this new data protection regime – they are a third of internet users, they are not a marginal group and should not be treated as such. I hope the Government will do more to ensure that children are properly served by the Bill.

As the Bill progresses I will support amendments made in the Lords that would deliver justice for the victims of phone hacking by ensuring a Leveson Part 2 style inquiry goes ahead, and ensuring Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act is commenced. The interests of a free and fair press should be balanced with the need not to defame people wilfully.

Mental Health Services: Children and Young People

On Thursday, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care made a statement on the Care Quality Commission's review of children and young people's mental health services.

In the report there is evidence of services actively putting up barriers to treatment, resulting in children and young people having to reach crisis point before being able to get access to the right treatment. It is concerning that children are suffering because of those high eligibility thresholds. This is particularly worrying given half of mental health problems develop before the age of 14 and three quarters develop before the age of 18.

The Minister was rightly pressed to look into referral criteria as a matter of urgency, so that children and young people get the proper treatment at the right time.

The Minister said that there had been an increase in spending on mental health services for children. However, the report links the excessively high eligibility thresholds and reductions in access with funding reductions and not enough capacity for services to respond to local needs, so, clearly not enough money is reaching the frontline.

The Government pledged to respond to this CQC review, alongside a consultation it held on children and young people's mental health provision, in the summer.

Domestic Gas and Electricity (Tariff Cap) Bill (Second Reading)

On Tuesday, the Domestic Gas and Electricity (Tariff Cap) was debated in the House of Commons.

I am supportive of the principles of this Bill, however I am concerned that it is now a little too late. Introducing an energy price cap is a sticking plaster, as I believe there are much deeper problems with the UK's energy market that need to be addressed.

The Government's manifesto committed to implement an energy price cap that would protect 17 million households.

After months of to-ing and fro-ing, a draft Bill was published in October 2017. This inaction has left millions of households to scrape through the winter facing a choice between cold homes or astronomical bills. Furthermore, in the last week, the UK has experienced one of its coldest periods for decades. The Government's delay has meant that four million households currently living in fuel poverty, one million of which include a disabled person, will be receiving huge bills at the end of the month. The price cap should have been in place this winter, and it was not.

I have been in favour of introducing a price cap on energy bills for years, and while the principles of the Bill are positive, I remain concerned that the Bill as currently drafted does not go far enough.

The Bill does not provide any direction from the Government on the preferred level of cap, which effectively passes the buck to Ofgem. In addition, the provisions for extending the cap beyond the end of 2020 are ambiguous. Finally, I am concerned that there is currently no guarantee that the price cap will be in place this winter, and I believe the Bill would be greatly improved by a hard deadline. As this Bill progresses through Parliament, I hope aspects of it can be fine-tuned, so that it can make the energy market more effective, fair and transparent.

Government Policy on Russia (Urgent Question)

On Tuesday, the Foreign Secretary was asked to make a statement on the Government's policy towards Russia.

Addressing speculation around the apparent poisoning of a former Russian double agent and his daughter in Salisbury, the Foreign Secretary emphasised that it would be wrong to prejudge the investigation being undertaken by the police and partner agencies. He added though that the Government would respond appropriately and robustly should evidence emerge that implies state responsibility.

On the UK's relationship with Russia, the Foreign Secretary outlined profound differences. He noted Russia's annexation of Crimea and aggression in Ukraine, interference in western democracies and support for the Assad regime in Syria. The Foreign Secretary noted that the UK took unilateral action in response to the death of Alexander Litvinenko, led the EU's sanctioning of Russia after the annexation of Crimea, and is holding Russia to account in the UN on Syria. I am extremely concerned by the incident in Salisbury and I pay tribute to the professionalism and bravery of the emergency services that dealt with it. As the investigation into this incident has only just started, I believe the time for specific questions about it or the Government's response will come at a later stage.

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