



**Alan Campbell MP Weekly Update**

**Friday 20th April 2018**



# Commons News

## **Syria (Government Statement)**

On Monday, the Prime Minister made a statement on recent UK military action in Syria. Up to 75 people were killed and as many as 500 were injured in a suspected chemical attack on the town of Douma, near Damascus, on 7 April. The Syrian regime has been found to have repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own people, and the Prime Minister said that it was highly likely the regime was also responsible for the attack on Douma.

Highlighting Russia's blocking of a UN resolution last week that would have established an independent investigation to determine responsibility for the attack in Douma, the Prime Minister said the Government had concluded that diplomatic action on its own will not work. She said that the Cabinet therefore agreed that it was both morally and legally right to take military action to alleviate further humanitarian suffering.

In the early hours of 14 April, British, American and French forces launched targeted missile strikes against three specific sites in Syria. These included the Him Shinsar chemical weapons storage site, which was assessed to be a location of Syrian sarin and precursor production equipment. In addition to missiles launched by American and French forces, the facility was hit by eight Storm Shadow missiles launched by four RAF Tornado GR4s.

The Prime Minister emphasised that the action taken was specifically focused on degrading the Syrian regime's chemical weapons capability and deterring their future use. She also outlined the legal basis that the Government used to justify the strikes which were targeted and proportionate. Nevertheless I believe the Prime Minister should have consulted Parliament before committing the UK to military action.

## **Syria (Emergency Debate)**

After the Prime Minister's statement on Monday on UK military action in Syria, the House of Commons debated the situation in Syria more widely and the Government's approach to it. The conflict in Syria has killed more than 400,000 people and resulted in over five million refugees. The UN also estimates that some 13.5 million Syrians need humanitarian assistance.

Our priority must be to put the interests of innocent civilians in Syria first. It is more important than ever that we take concrete steps to halt and finally end their suffering. I believe the Government should take a diplomatic lead, acting through the UN and engaging with all parties involved, to negotiate an immediate ceasefire. I recognise though that this will be difficult, and I deplore the vetoes by Russia in the UN on resolutions relating to Syria. Indeed, Russia has blocked resolutions seeking to investigate the use of chemical weapons, attribute responsibility and impose sanctions. However, the need to restart genuine negotiations for peace and a political settlement of the conflict in Syria, including the withdrawal of all foreign forces and the right of the Syrian people to determine their own future, could not be more urgent.

## **Military Action Overseas: Parliamentary Approval (Emergency Debate)**

On Tuesday, the House of Commons considered Parliament's rights in relation to the approval of military action by British forces overseas.

There is currently no legal requirement for the Government to obtain parliamentary consent for military action. However, since 2003, a parliamentary convention has developed whereby approval will be sought from the House of Commons before committing UK forces to pre-meditated, hostile, military action overseas.

There is no more serious issue than committing our armed forces to action. In the most serious matters of peace and security, I believe the Prime Minister should, as far as it is possible, consult Parliament.

## **Windrush Children (Immigration Status)**

On Monday, the Home Secretary was asked to make a statement on the children of the Windrush generation.

The Windrush generation were invited here as citizens to help rebuild the UK after the Second World War. Many came as children and have been here for decades. This is their home and they have contributed hugely to our country.

However, there has been a growing crisis of citizens facing unexpected immigration difficulties because of problems in proving their status. Many of those affected arrived in the UK on their parents' passports and may never have had their immigration status formalised.

Several cases have been highlighted where the Government has treated people as illegal aliens. Some have been denied the free NHS care they are entitled to or threatened with deportation. Some may even have been deported in error.

The mistreatment of the Windrush generation is scandalous and is a direct consequence of the Government's "hostile environment" policy for migrants. In 2014, the Government removed the immigration protection that existed for Commonwealth citizens who had come here previously. This was done without parliamentary debate or scrutiny.

On Monday, the Home Secretary confirmed that the Windrush generation do have the right to remain, and apologised for any confusion or anxiety caused. She also announced a new dedicated team to help individuals to evidence their right to be here and to access necessary services. The Prime Minister has also now apologised to Commonwealth leaders.

## **Surgical Mesh (Backbench Business Debate)**

On Thursday, the House of Commons debated a backbench motion on surgical mesh. I sympathise profoundly with anyone who is suffering complications because of a surgical mesh implant. Some women have been left in permanent pain, unable to walk, and unable to work because of the procedure.

This month, NHS Digital published the results of its audit into how many patients have received surgical mesh implants. I welcome this audit as a first step in understanding the scale of the number of women affected by this scandal, yet Ministers need to be much clearer about the ongoing risks posed by mesh products.

## **Antisemitism (General Debate)**

On Tuesday, there was a general debate in the House of Commons on antisemitism.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government opened the debate and emphasised that both sides of the House need to stand united in recognising the pernicious prejudice of antisemitism.

It is deeply troubling to see rising antisemitism and race hate both in the UK and abroad. On social media, antisemitism is in plain sight. In January 2018, the World Jewish Congress found a 30% increase in antisemitic posts since 2016 and almost twice as many posts denying the Holocaust. I believe that more can be done to make Facebook, Twitter and all online companies take down both antisemitic abuse and other abuse more quickly. I am also concerned that this year's Community Security Trust (CST) report found that hate incidents have reached a record level in the UK, including a 34% increase in the number of violent antisemitic assaults.

## **Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Bill (Second Reading)**

On Wednesday, the House of Commons debated the Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Bill, which makes it an offence to shine a laser at cars, trains, ships and air traffic control.

It is currently an offence to direct or shine any light at an aircraft in flight, with a maximum penalty fine of £2,500. However, this Bill will extend the offence to other vehicles, remove the cap on the amount that an offender can be fined, and make it easier to prosecute offenders by removing the need to prove an intention to endanger the vehicle.

I fully support this Bill and am pleased that the Government is legislating on laser misuse.

Worryingly, there has been a sharp rise in the misuse of lasers in recent years. For example, Civil Aviation Authority figures have indicated that between 2009 and 2016 there was a 70% increase in the number of incidents in which a laser was shone at an aircraft in the UK.

## **Gender Pay Gap (Urgent Question)**

On Wednesday, the Minister for Women was asked to make a statement on the Government's action on the gender pay gap.

The Minister for Women stated that in 2018 it is unacceptable that there are still differences in how men and women are paid. She outlined the Government's actions, including the introduction of new regulations requiring all employers with 250 or more employees to report their gender pay gaps. She also stated that the Government was building on research, and supporting employers to understand their pay gap and what they can do to make a difference.

The Minister stated that the introduction of mandatory gender pay gap reporting had shone a light on this issue and created a new conversation on the need for change. However, I believe that now we need action, not just audits.

The introduction of mandatory auditing, which was legislated for in the 2010 Equality Act, was to have been just the first step towards narrowing and closing the gender pay gap. Beyond this, we need action plans for companies and organisations to close the pay gap; Government certification for fair equality practices; further auditing and fines for those organisations that fail to get certification of their equality practices; and to shift the responsibility for unequal pay from the employee to the employer.

## **Industrial Strategy (General Debate)**

On Wednesday, the House of Commons considered industrial strategy.

The Government published its industrial strategy in November last year. On Wednesday, the Business Secretary outlined that the strategy was based on four grand challenges focused on: artificial intelligence and the data-driven economy; clean growth; the future of mobility; and meeting the needs of an ageing society. The Business Secretary also highlighted that the industrial strategy aimed to address the UK's relative weakness in productivity by investing in research and development, skills, the different needs of different places, a supportive business environment and infrastructure.

I believe that the key questions that must be asked of the Government's industrial strategy are whether it is working and whether it addresses the huge problems our economy is facing. Unfortunately, on these problems the evidence is not good. Productivity growth over the last ten years has been the worst since 1820, UK GDP growth in 2017 was weaker than in any other G7 nation, and average weekly earnings are lower now in real terms than they were in 2007. In addition, Brexit and the UK's economic framework promote uncertainty for business, while the UK also remains one of the most unequal countries in Europe in terms of household income.

I agree with the Government on the need for an effective industrial strategy. However, the current strategy is inadequate. It is thin on detail and new proposals, and appears to be nothing more than a repackaging of existing ideas. What detail it does contain focuses on a handful of elite sectors in which the UK already has a comparative advantage. This will do nothing to help the millions who work in retail, hospitality and care, and other large low wage, low productivity sectors, or people who live outside of London, Cambridge and Oxford.

## **Cancer Treatment (Backbench Business Debate)**

On Thursday, the House of Commons debated a backbench motion on cancer treatment.

One in two people will be affected by cancer in their lifetime. Over the years, cancer survival rates have steadily improved, yet the number of new cancer cases in England continues to rise year on year. By 2020, it is estimated that 2.4 million people in England will have had a cancer diagnosis at some point in their lives.

The Cancer Strategy, published in 2015, was a welcome step forward to achieving the best cancer care and outcomes in the world and I am committed to seeing that strategy implemented in full. Every cancer patient in the UK, regardless of who they are, where they live, and how much they earn, should have access to the best treatment and care available on the NHS.

I believe the Government should prioritise patients in their work with pharmaceutical companies and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) to ensure that life-saving treatments are available for all cancer patients in the UK, on the NHS.

## **Contact Alan**

99 Howard Street,  
North Shields NE30 1NA  
[www.alancampbellmp.co.uk](http://www.alancampbellmp.co.uk)  
[campbellal@parliament.uk](mailto:campbellal@parliament.uk)  
[@alancampbellmp](https://twitter.com/alancampbellmp)  
Facebook AlanCampbellIMP  
0191 2571927