



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT– 9–13 January 2017

Welcome to my *This Week in Parliament*, my weekly newsletter on events and developments in Parliament. **Let me know what you think of the new layout!**

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Parliament returned this week following the Christmas break. Health policy including the NHS and the provision of social care took up a lot of Parliamentary time, but there were plenty of opportunities to contribute to on a variety of issues ranging from rights for the self-employed, domestic violence, international development and Yemen. It is rare to have quite so many opportunities to speak, but it leaves me with plenty to follow up on. I have also included some background to written statements and an update on the proposed take-over of Sky Plc about which a lot of constituents got in touch just before Christmas. Please get in touch if you have any feedback or questions.

Monday

The first day back after the Christmas break was a busy one, starting with [questions to the Department for Work and Pensions](#). My question was not selected in the draw, but I took the chance to try and catch the Speaker's eye and make a contribution around the rights of self-employed workers.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): *What is the Secretary of State going to do about people who are classified as self-employed because of their contract of employment? They are classified as such not because they have set up their own small business, but because their employer requires them to sign a contract saying that they are self-employed, which means that they get no sick pay and no annual leave. How is he going to help them?*

Damian Green (Secretary of State for Work and Pensions): *I agree that that is an issue, which is precisely why we have set up the Matthew Taylor review. It is investigating precisely the new types of employment structures that have been set up in recent years and making sure that employment laws keep up with new types of employment.*



Cross-examination of domestic violence victims

Following questions, there was an [urgent question](#) regarding an emergency review announced by the Ministry of Justice on the cross-examination of victims of domestic violence by perpetrators in family courts. This issue was raised in a debate on domestic violence and the justice system last autumn and it is a welcome sign of progress that a review has been announced. I was able to use the opportunity to raise a related concern about the use of the court system by perpetrators to pursue their victims;

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): A constituent who came to see me was extremely distressed because her husband was repeatedly taking her back to the family court over access issues. She was not only undergoing cross-examination but being driven into financial poverty through constantly having to fund her own defence. Will the Minister look at how the courts can deal with the vexatious, repeated requests relating to access that are behind a lot of coercive behaviour and at the financial poverty that families find themselves in as a result?



Sir Oliver Heald (the Minister for Courts and Justice): The hon. Lady makes an important point, and I should like to pay tribute to the work that she does in this area. I am more than happy to raise that point in the Family Justice Board and to look at the matter, but it is not part of the important work that we are doing to deal urgently with the question of cross-examination. Her point bears on that work, but it is not the focus of what we are doing at the moment. We will, however, look into it.

Suicide Prevention

Next up was a [statement from the Secretary of State for Health on mental health and NHS performance](#). Concerns about how the NHS in England is coping during the winter months dominated, but the statement also included an announcement on the publication of a new suicide prevention strategy. As Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention, I was hopeful of being called by the Speaker. My contribution asked the Secretary of State to make time to meet an academic who has developed a triage system for mental health patients. Now that this is on the record, the next step will be to write to the Secretary of State to follow-up Mr. Hunt's undertaking to attend a meeting.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I welcome the publication of the new suicide prevention strategy, and I welcome the fact that it includes self-harm. I am also grateful for the mention of the work of the all-party group on suicide and self-harm prevention, which I chair. Will the Secretary of State meet Dr Robert Colgate? He has set out a triaging system for mental health, which means that people do not have to wait six to nine months to see a consultant. With the support of frontline staff, they can get an immediate triage assessment and assistance for their condition. Will the Secretary of State meet urgently Dr Colgate, whose work is being peer reviewed by the University of Manchester, to look at how his system, which is being rolled out throughout England, can help us to tackle the problems we have?

Mr Hunt (Secretary of State for Health): I thank the hon. Lady for her work on the all-party group. I am more than happy to meet Dr Colgate. The purpose of the refreshed suicide prevention strategy is to try to ensure that we adopt best practice throughout the country. Some areas of the country are doing a very good job in suicide prevention, particularly in co-opting the public so that they understand that they can make a difference, too, but I am happy to explore with the hon. Lady what more can be done.

Tuesday

Following hot on the heels of the statement by Secretary of State for Health on mental health and by pure coincidence, Tuesday started with a [Westminster Hall debate on children's mental health and wellbeing](#) in schools led by the Liberal Democrat, Norman Lamb MP. For members to speak in these debates, the process is simple, but important to follow out of courtesy to the member leading the debate. It is necessary to write to the Speaker to indicate that you want to take part and let the other member know. This means you are guaranteed to be called to speak, but also that your appearance does not cause any surprise. Preparing to speak in these debates is complicated by the fact that you cannot be sure how long you will have so to a degree you have to be able to think on your feet and adapt what you planned to say as necessary.

I used [the time I had](#) to focus on the alarming increase in self-harm amongst young people.

The all-party group works only with academics; on the whole, the people who come to speak to us come from an academic background. Their work is fully researched, and the way forward is understood. Just before Christmas, two researchers from the National Centre for Social Research, Sally McManus and Caroline Turley, addressed the all-party group. They discussed the findings of the recently published adult psychiatric morbidity survey, which examined trends in mental health and well-being since 2000.



It was extremely depressing. One of the first things that they mentioned was self-harm. The all-party group considers both suicide and self-harm prevention, because self-harm is often an early indicator that someone is suffering from mental health problems. If we ignore it, we just build up problems for the future. Self-harm among 16 to 24-year-olds has doubled since 2000. One in four women and girls aged 16 to 24 have self-harmed, rising to one in three among over-18s. In 2000, one in 15 young women between 16 and 24 reported having self-harmed. By 2015, that figure was one in five.

Young women are twice as likely as young men to self-harm. They do so for a number of reasons, but it is often to relieve tension, anxiety and depression. For them, it is a coping mechanism. Triggers vary from one individual to the next, but bullying via social media, low self-esteem and anxiety are often cited. Some care must be taken in considering those figures, as the rise might be due to increased willingness to report, but the increase is borne out by other studies. Clearly, that level of distress cannot be ignored.

Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill

At the end of November, I took part in the Second Reading of the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill. This new Bill seeks to raise that limit to £6bn and give the Government power to increase contributions to £12bn without the need for further legislation. Following the Second Reading, the Bill was considered by a committee. Attempts were made to amend the Bill to put conditions on how much money the Government could give to the CDC and what that money could be spent on. This reflected concerns that money has been spent in the past on projects which have not benefited those who need it. The amendments were not adopted, so a second attempt was made when the Bill returned on Tuesday afternoon at what is called the [Report Stage](#). I spoke in support of these amendments, but frustratingly they were not adopted when it came to a vote.

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***I am particularly** pleased to follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard). I am speaking today because of concerns brought to me by constituents, and only concerns brought to me by constituents. No NGOs have lobbied me. Constituents contacted me before Second Reading to express concern that, if the Bill were passed, we would run the real risk of aid money being spent inappropriately, and of our commitment to aid, of which we can all be proud, being undermined. I return to that concern, which I raised on Second Reading, and to what for me and my constituents are the core issues: directing the money to where it is needed most; scrutiny; and transparency.*

On Second Reading, I quoted the recent NAO report on CDC. I know that has already been quoted today, but it bears listening to again. The report concluded:

“It remains a significant challenge for CDC to demonstrate its ultimate objective of creating jobs and making a lasting difference to people’s lives in some of the world’s poorest places. Given the Department’s plans to invest further in CDC, a clearer picture of actual development impact would help to demonstrate...value for money”.

Like many Members, I face questions on a regular basis, but in the past couple of weeks I have increasingly faced them about inappropriate international development spending. People come back to this issue over and over again. Last week, when I spoke to Porthcawl’s Newton Women’s Institute, I took many questions on international development. I hope that the amendments and new clauses will allay many of the fears that my constituents have raised and set the important work that DFID does—it changes lives in some of the poorest countries in the world—as something that our constituents can all support, because they can see that it is transparent, scrutinised and accountable. Without that, I fear we face yet more weeks of negative and often false news reporting, which will undermine the credibility of the vital work that this country undertakes around the world.

Wednesday

Away from Prime Minister’s Questions, dominated by questions about the NHS, there was an **urgent question on the future of the Green Investment Bank (GIB)**. The question sprang from concerns that the Government plans to privatise the GIB and who might seek to buy it and what that would mean for its future. More information about the work of the bank is available **here**.

In answering the question initially, the Minister for Climate Change and Industry, **Nick Hurd MP**, set out the Government’s plans;

The Government set out their plans for the sale of the Green Investment Bank in the document “Green Investment Bank: Sale of Shares” laid before Parliament on 3 March 2016. The Government intend to move the GIB into the private sector, so that it can increase its access to private capital and increase its green impact free from the constraints of government ownership. Potential bidders are interested in the GIB precisely because of its green specialism. We are asking potential investors to confirm their commitment to GIB’s green values and investment principles, and how they propose to protect them, as part of their bids for the company. In addition, the Government have approved the creation of a special share, held by independent trustees, to protect GIB’s green purposes in future.

The MP who tabled the urgent question, Caroline Lucas, outlined concerns about this process;

Caroline Lucas MP (Brighton Pavilion, Green) *I thank the Minister for his reply, but it gives very little reassurance, given that everybody knows who the preferred bidder is. The preferred bidder, Macquarie, has a very, very worrying and dubious track record. I am putting this question today with support from*

across the House.



This week, we heard that the Green Investment Bank stands on the brink not just of being flogged off but broken up, with its green purposes discarded. Founded in 2012, the GIB has been widely recognised as a true success story, kick-starting truly innovative low-carbon projects across the UK, yet the preferred bidder—Macquarie—not only has a dismal and terrible environmental record

but an appalling track record of asset-stripping. So why have the Government given preferred bidder status to this company? What assessment have the Government made of Macquarie's record, given that in 2005 the board of the London stock exchange deemed Macquarie unfit to conduct a takeover?

Written Statements

Changes to Government policy, consultations or updates from Ministers attending international meetings do not always make it to the Chamber for discussion. The Government can publish 'news' via the mechanism of a written statement. In part this exists, because there isn't the Parliamentary time available to debate every last Government announcement. These are published in Hansard alongside the transcripts from the debates of the day. While not hidden from view, there has been a suspicion that written statements are sometimes used to release bad news because they do not get the air time the Chamber does. One of the tasks each day backbenchers ought to undertake is to check what written statements are expected and to check the statement when it is published. They are all available [online](#).

A good example of the information that can be released appeared this week through a written statement published by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport regarding the proposed takeover of Sky Plc by 21st Century Fox—a subject which provoked a great deal of concern just before Christmas. Part of the statement is below—the full version is available [here](#);

Sky Plc announced on Friday 9 December that it had received an approach from 21st Century Fox Inc to acquire the 61% share of Sky Plc which it does not already own and I made a statement on 20 December about the proposed merger and the process that would need to be followed.

21st Century Fox have been in contact with my officials and have confirmed that they intend to notify the proposed merger to the European Commission for review under the EU merger regulation. Before formal notification, the parties intend to engage in pre-notification discussions with the Commission from January onwards. The timing of a formal notification to the Commission is therefore not fixed and will happen dependent on the parties' ongoing discussions with the Commission. It is in the nature of this process that we cannot know in advance the dates upon which certain steps will happen.

Any decision I do take on whether or not to intervene will be a quasi-judicial one and it is important that I am able to act independently and that the process is scrupulously fair and impartial. As a result, I will not be commenting on the merits of the proposed merger. I do, however, I recognise that this is an issue of significant interest to the public and has raised a lot of interest in Parliament, as well as being a significant issue for the parties concerned. I will therefore be keeping Parliament informed of the process as it moves ahead and will make a further statement when the parties have formally notified the Commission, ahead of making any decision about whether to intervene.

Thursday

The conflict and dire humanitarian situation in Yemen has been debated in the House on several occasions, but sadly it remains a forgotten war, slipping down the news agenda as a result of the equally terrible events in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. It was the subject of a Backbench Business debate on Thursday, which drew a number of thoughtful interventions. I was able to contribute with a speech and some interventions. The full transcript is available [here](#).

Former Foreign Office Minister, [Alastair Burt MP](#) spoke about the origins of the conflict;

The conflict exists on the back of the civil strife that has been going on in Yemen for a long time. It exists because Yemen is genuinely important. Yemen matters, and this should not be a forgotten war in a forgotten country.

It is very easy for us on these comfortable Benches here in Westminster to talk about disproportionality in a conflict far away. My point is that the United Kingdom has focused on the activities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia without truly understanding why it is engaged, why the coalition is there and why the United Kingdom has an interest. I simply want to put that on the record. That is not, in any way, to minimise the reason and need for humanitarian law to be respected and for the activities of those who engage in warfare to conduct it according to the rules, but it does raise the rarely made argument about why on earth we are engaged in this and why the outcome matters to the United Kingdom.



I was able to [contribute](#) in a similar vein;

In a region where the headlines so often include the horrific barrel bombing of civilians in Aleppo, a rising tide of refugees, murder, rape, and the torture of followers of differing religious groups, the warring parties in the Yemeni conflict have no real impetus in getting behind peace initiatives. I appreciate that the UN special envoy has worked hard. There is little in the motion before us that I think anyone in this House would not support, but I will talk about where we should be going because I am not going to get into a tit-for-tat argument about whether the Saudis are the main problem or whether the coalition is the problem. The problem is that we do not have a clear road map to resolve the conflict.

The situation is a matter of urgent attention for the world. In my view, it is only the United Nations that can speak on behalf of the world, so it is to the UN that we must turn. It is the UN's responsibility to take that bottom-up, rather than top-down, approach. A coalition of support for the people of Yemen is where we must give our support. Rather than dividing the issue into attacks on Saudi Arabia or attacks on Iran, let us focus on the peace needs of the people of Yemen.

Hendry Review on Tidal Lagoons

Elsewhere on Thursday, an independent review of tidal lagoons in the UK was published, which is of particular interest to South Wales as it addresses the prospects for a number of large-scale tidal lagoon projects in off our coast including at Swansea. Amongst the main recommendations, the author, Charles Hendry, calls on the Government to proceed with the Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon as a pilot project before other projects are given the green light. His report makes the economic case for developing tidal lagoons; highlighting the number of engineering/manufacturing jobs it would create and the opportunity for the UK to become a world leader in developing this technology. Environmental concerns about the impact however remain. The full report is available to download [here](#).

Constituency Update

Since my last report in mid-November, I have done a number of visits in the constituency.

Christmas rush



Ahead of Christmas, I visited the Bridgend Sorting Office to meet the postmen and women who were working at full tilt to deal with the annual Christmas rush. I met Robert Heylar and his team who were busy sorting the mail ready for delivery.

Neighbourhood Food Collection

In early December, I visited Tesco to support the Neighbourhood Food Collection, a nation-wide drive to encourage shoppers to donate to foodbank stocks. The annual event is organised in conjunction with the Trussell Trust and FareShare. Since it started, the initiative has donated 38 million meals, 2.8 million last year alone.



Newton WI

I was delighted to be invited to speak to Newton WI members, many of whom I knew. I was pleased by their desire to know more about the workings of their Parliament. Following my talk there were many interesting questions asked about the urgent repairs needed to the Palace of Westminster, my role in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and defence of the realm. Concern was made about the cutbacks in defence spending on recruitment and equipment and the ability to defend ourselves in an ever increasing hostile world and the amount of money going to International Aid. Even Brexit was touched upon but only slightly!



Spectrum Technologies

At the end of November, I visited Spectrum Technologies to congratulate Peter Dickenson and his staff on winning the Bridgend Business Award for Innovative Business of the Year and also The Patron's Commendation Award 2016. We discussed amongst other things apprenticeships and transport links.

