



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT– 6-10 March 2017

Welcome to my *This Week in Parliament*, my weekly newsletter on events and developments in Parliament. **Your feedback is always welcome!**

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The main event of the week was the Budget which means this edition is longer than usual. Debates on what it contained are now scheduled for next week, legislation to implement the measures Mr. Hammond announced will follow in due course including on the controversial rise in Class 4 national insurance contributions. As well as the Budget, the Brexit Bill continued its journey through the House of Lords, where another amendment was added to it. The Bill is expected to return to the Commons on Monday so we can expect a busy week of votes. Elsewhere, on International Women’s Day, Parliament hosted a lobby of WASPI women, there was another opportunity to raise the issue of Ford at Bridgend and I took part in a debate on young onset Parkinson’s disease led by my colleague Nick Thomas-Symonds MP.

Monday

As the Brexit Bill continues through the Lords, subjects other than our departure from the EU were considered this week. On Monday afternoon, in the usual slot devoted to debating petitions, the issue of workplace dress codes was considered. The petition which led to this debate called for an end to dress codes which can require for instance, women being forced to wear high heels to work. You can read more about the petition and the Government’s response [here](#).

[Helen Jones MP](#), who opened the debate, explained the background;



Hon. Members here will remember how the petition came about. Nicola Thorp, who created the petition, worked for an agency called Portico. In December 2015, she was sent for a job as a temporary receptionist at the headquarters of Pricewaterhouse-Coopers in London. When she arrived, she was told that the smart black shoes she was wearing were unacceptable because they were flat; at the time, Portico’s dress code specified a heel height of between two and four inches—for women, not men. She was offered the opportunity to go out and buy a pair of high heels. When she refused, she was sent home without pay.

The Government think that the law is fairly clear on this. In their answer to the petition, they were clear that the requirement to wear high heels, as experienced by Nicola Thorp, is illegal under the Equality Act 2010. We received some legal evidence that suggested the law is not quite so clear. The legal opinions we heard suggested that a conventional dress code, for

want of a better term, might not constitute direct discrimination under the Equality Act, because men and women tend to dress differently. However, if that dress code impacted more on one sex than another, it was likely to be indirect discrimination. The problem is that indirect discrimination can be justified if it is reasonably necessary in pursuit of a legitimate end, but there is not a proper definition of “legitimate end”.

More importantly, not only can tribunals decide cases differently in different parts of the country, but very few cases are getting to tribunal at all. We heard that there is very little case law or advice for employers.

In response, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, Caroline Dinenage, was sympathetic and outlined the existing legislation that should protect women who find themselves subject to unfair practices. There was also a hint that the Government may take on recommendations by the Women and Equalities Committee—which you can see [here](#).

We are carefully considering the Committees’ report and recommendations and will be issuing a response later this month. I do not want to pre-empt that response, but the evidence sessions conducted by the Committees were invaluable in setting out the extent of the problem. They highlighted some shocking workplace dress code requirements, such as the requirement to re-apply makeup throughout the day and to dress in a sexualised fashion, supposedly to attract clients and customers. I do not know who should feel most insulted by that: the person being required to re-apply their makeup or the consumers whose intelligence is being insulted by the suggestion that a fresh coat of lipstick will somehow induce them to purchase something.

Automotive industry

In the House of Commons Chamber, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Greg Clark, came to answer [an urgent question about the confirmed purchase of Vauxhall/Opel by PSA Group](#). The primary concern was the future of the two Vauxhall plants in the UK as it is feared that the French PSA Group may look to close some sites to rationalise its operation. I used the opportunity to raise the issue of Ford at Bridgend again. Later that evening, I and other local MPs met with Mr. Clark to discuss further action.

Madeleine Moon MP: *I thank the Secretary of State for his kind offer after last week to meet me later today along with colleagues representing seats along the south Wales M4 corridor to talk about what happened with Ford in Bridgend last week, but today we have another announcement. It looks as though we are going to have drip, drip, drip announcements, causing great anxiety to people in the automotive industry. I asked the Prime Minister if we could have a summit involving MPs, manufacturers and the trade unions; is it not now time to call such a summit, so that rather than companies being taken apart one by one, we can discuss this as a whole House?*



Secretary of State: *I am looking forward to meeting the hon. Lady with her colleagues later today, but I do not think that is the right way to think about what has been proposed between the two companies today. It is a transfer of the assets of GM in Europe to PSA. What is needed is activism and alacrity on every one of these investments. I make that commitment to the hon. Lady with respect to Ford, and when we meet later today we can talk about what is required in terms of those discussions.*

Young onset Parkinson's disease

At the end of each day there is an adjournment debate, usually running for about 30 minutes. Backbench MPs can apply for a slot to raise a subject of their choosing. Welsh colleague, Nick Thomas-Symonds MP, secured [an adjournment debate on Monday evening about the problems facing young people diagnosed with Parkinson's disease](#). As Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Parkinson's, I contributed to the debate by raising the possibilities offered by a digital watch which can help monitor patients and ensure that they are taking their medication at the right time. The watch is being piloted by a group of patients at the Princess of Wales Hospital.



Madeleine Moon MP: *Is my hon. Friend aware of the Parkinson's KinetiGraph watch? It is new on the market and was developed by Global Kinetics Corporation. It monitors the medication taken by a Parkinson's patient and will send a message over the internet to a consultant with information about whether the medication is at the right level and has been taken at the right time, thereby enabling people to stay in work longer and to control their tremors much better.*

David Mowat The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health: *I also thank the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) for the work she does on the all-party group and for demonstrating the kinetic watch. I had not seen one before this evening, but I look forward to seeing it perhaps after this sitting.*

Tuesday

The main event on Tuesday was a second defeat for the Government by the House of Lords on the EU (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill. Before getting to that, Government Ministers faced a challenging time in the House of Commons on refugee children.

A new Dubs amendment?

The Children and Social Work Bill returned to the House on Tuesday afternoon for its final stages. A group of MPs took the opportunity to propose an amendment (New Clause 14) that would require the Government to consult with local authorities on their capacity to look after unaccompanied refugee children. (I signed the amendment). This followed the closure of the Dubs Scheme which provided for the transfer of unaccompanied refugee children to the UK. The amendment was defeated, albeit by a narrow margin of 20 votes, but did serve the purpose to keep up the momentum behind the campaign.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire, Con): *I rise to speak to new clause 14, which is in my name. My interest in the Bill is born out of the refugee crisis sweeping across Europe. I am interested in how the Bill might apply to safeguarding children in our care. The Government have a tremendous record in the Syria*

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region, but, for me and for many in the House, there remains a big issue in Europe that has still not been addressed. How we safeguard children who might come to us from Europe is a matter close to all our hearts.

Let us get the elephant out there. For many of us, this debate is about the Dubs amendment and whether we can bring it back to life. The heart of the amendment is about consulting local authorities on their capacity. Why is that of interest to us? It specifically interests me because since the Government announced that the Dubs scheme would be closed, local authorities across the country have stepped forward to say that they can do more

This refugee crisis will not end neatly at the end of this financial year, so our ability to consult local authorities to understand their capacity must not end neatly at the end of this financial year, either. The timescale of the strategies we are debating today—for consulting local authorities and caring for children in our care and for unaccompanied children who come to us as refugees or asylum seekers—must be maintained over and beyond the end of this financial year.

A second rebellion



Following the Government's defeat in the Lords last week, a second rebellion on the Brexit Bill was widely predicted. This time the Lords voted to support [the following amendment](#);

(1) The Prime Minister may not conclude an agreement with the European Union under Article 50(2) of the Treaty on European Union, on the terms of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, without the approval of both Houses of Parliament.(2) Such approval shall be required before the European Parliament debates and votes on that agreement.(3) The prior approval of both Houses of Parliament shall also be required in relation to an agreement on the future relationship of the United Kingdom with the European Union.(4) The prior approval of both Houses of Parliament shall also be required in relation to any decision by the Prime Minister that the United Kingdom shall leave the European Union without an agreement as to the applicable terms."

[Lord Pannick](#), who tabled the amendment, explained the rationale; during the Bill's consideration in the Commons, the Government gave an undertaking that Parliament would have a vote, but this was not included on the face of the Bill,

The Prime Minister has accepted that principle: she has undertaken that any agreement with the European Union on the terms of our withdrawal, and any agreement on our future relationship with the EU, will

be put to both Houses of Parliament for their approval. She has also promised that this will occur before the withdrawal agreement is sent to the European Parliament for its consent. That must be right: this Parliament must have at least the same opportunity as the European Parliament to disagree with the terms of any draft agreement. The Prime Minister has given an undertaking but the Government are refusing to include the commitment in the Bill. Given the importance of the decision to leave the EU and the importance of the terms on which we are to do that, the role of Parliament must surely be written into the Bill—no ifs and no buts.

The Lords were not unanimous over the need for the amendment nor its implications;

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: *Can the noble Lord explain? He has repeatedly said that what he has put in his amendment and wants to put in the Bill is no different from what the Prime Minister indicated to the House of Commons. Surely the difference is that the Prime Minister's undertaking was that there would be a vote in both Houses on the issue of a deal or falling back on WTO. Reading his amendment, his difference is between no deal and what? What happens? Can he explain?*

Lord Pannick: *What happens? Nobody knows what will happen: that is the whole point of the difficulty that we face in 21 months' time. I do not know what will happen. The noble Lord does not know what will happen. I am saying to the House that it is essential that Parliament has an opportunity, guaranteed by legislation, to address the circumstances at the time.*

Defence Select Committee—Investigation of fatalities involving British military personnel

Following on from the Committee's inquiry into Iraq Historic Allegations Team and erroneous legal cases against members of the Armed Forces, we have now turned our attention to looking at Northern Ireland. More information about the inquiry including the full transcript is available via this [link](#). In a session on Tuesday morning, the Committee's chair set out what we are seeking to clarify;



Dr. Julian Lewis MP: Our main focus in this session will be on identifying the options that are available to Ministers to prevent former service personnel from being subjected to further investigations when matters that had been disposed of because they were investigated previously have been reopened—or it is proposed to reopen them—without any new evidence being provided. Our work intends to build on the Committee's report into IHAT and the recommendations contained within that, and in particular those aimed at countering the expansion of what is known as “lawfare” in historic investigations. The inquiry is therefore of a technical nature, focusing on what options are available to the Government. We are not seeking to revisit the Belfast Agreement or to opine upon the broader issues arising from the legacy of the Troubles.

One of the issues we looked at was how to avoid the mistakes of IHAT, but at the same time give families the opportunity to seek closure;

Mrs Moon: *I want to look at what principles the Government should be looking at to underpin the investigation of the Historical Investigations Unit to prevent us from having a repeat of what happened with IHAT. What happened there was almost a get-rich-quick scheme and harassment took place. We are*

desperate to prevent that from happening again. What are the principles that should underpin the unit that would make sure, as far as possible, that we get some of the justice that you have talked about for those who were shot and give their families the opportunity to explore what happened and whether an illegal action took place, but at the same time protect individual soldiers from judicial harassment where there is no need for it—where there has actually been full process and there is no action to answer for? What can we do?

Professor Sands: *I think that what you ought to look very closely at is a move away from criminal law as the means of doing this. The way that these things have worked in other jurisdictions is variations on mechanisms of truth and reconciliation, in which people come forward with information and, as part of providing that information, effectively take themselves out from a criminal process. That has worked in several jurisdictions, it is much more cost-effective, it tends to create harmony rather than discord, it is quicker and it is cheaper, if—this is the crucial point—you can get political will by the participants.*

Wednesday

The Last Spring Budget

On Wednesday the Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered the Budget, this comes at a significant time with the triggering of Article 50 on the horizon. It was also the 'last' Spring Budget - last year the Chancellor announced that there will be only one Budget Report in the Autumn (the first to take place later this year) and a Statement in Spring which would not be a major fiscal event.

In many respects the Budget was perhaps quite unremarkable with relatively minimal spending commitments and few headline changes announced. One area that the Government have come under considerable pressure however, has been about the increases in the rate of National Insurance that self-employed workers pay. Growth was revised down for 2016, 2018, and every remaining year of the Parliament except for a moderate rise this year. Despite the moderately improved growth forecast for this year - 2%, up from 1.4% - lower growth in subsequent years means the UK's deficit is forecast to still be £16.8bn by 2021-22.



National Insurance Increase for Self-Employed

The Chancellor announced that there would be increases in the rate of National Insurance paid by self-employed workers. The main rate of Class 4 National Insurance contributions for the self-employed are to increase from 9% to 10% in April 2018 and 11% in April 2019

This is a broken Manifesto promise by the Conservatives – in 2015 they promised: "We will not raise VAT, National Insurance contributions or income tax". The Chancellor's decision to raise National Insurance contributions therefore represents a broken pledge. This will put extra pressure on the 4.8 million self-employed people. For Bridgend, this means that up to 3,200 people could see a tax rise from April

2018.

Growth and Borrowing

The Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, Paul Johnson said that Britain faces “a third parliament of austerity”.

“We remain on course to be borrowing about £20bn in 2020 – that’s £30bn more than intended a year ago. That leaves a lot of work to do in the next parliament to get to the planned budget balance. It looks like being, I’m afraid, a third parliament of austerity.”

He said current forecasts suggest that by 2022 people will have gone 15 years without an effective pay rise.

“Income and earnings growth over the next few years still look like being weak. On current forecasts average earnings will be no higher in 2022 than they were in 2007. Fifteen years without a pay rise. I’m rather lost for superlatives. This is completely unprecedented.”

Welsh funding

Mr Hammond highlighted that unemployment in Wales has fallen fastest and that there will be an extra £200 million for the Welsh Government over four years - that's £150m over three years, plus £50m capital over four years, as result of business rates, skills and social care spending in England.

Wales has had some modest additions to our Budget, which are always welcome, but these need to be viewed in the wider context of previous cuts. The Spring Budget has not changed the overall impact on the Welsh Budget. Wales’ capital budget in 2019-20 will be 11% or £200m lower in real terms than in 2010-11 and the revenue budget in 2019-20 is down 8% or £1bn in real terms since 2010-11. Furthermore, Mark Drakeford, Wales' Finance Secretary has concerns about how future UK spending cuts of £3.5 billion would affect Welsh public services.

What the Chancellor did not mention:

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Budget was what the Chancellor neglected to tackle. For example, there was no mention whatsoever of Brexit! With the uncertainties over the effects of Brexit, it was quite surprising that there was no mention about any potential assistance to help the UK or the Welsh economy to protect people’s jobs and wages in preparation for the transformational changes ahead.

He neither mentioned the issue of establishing a Children’s Funeral Fund for bereaved parents. This is something, the Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, raised in his response to the Chancellor.

Jeremy Corbyn: “This is the reality facing Britain today: a Government cutting services and the living standards of the many, to continue to fund the tax cuts of the few. Some people are doing very well under the Conservative Government. The chief executives of big companies are now paid 180 times more than the average worker and being taxed less. Big corporations are making higher profits and being taxed less. Speculators are making more and being taxed less. The wealthiest families are taxed less due to cuts in inheritance tax. All that adds up to £70 billion of tax giveaways over the next five years to those who need it the least. This Government have the wrong priorities.



Let me give three examples. The pain of losing a child is unimaginable for most of us, but for those who do lose a child, their pain is worsened by the stress of having to pay for their own child’s funeral. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for her campaign to establish a children’s

funeral fund, but far from establishing such a fund, which would cost just £10 million a year, the Government are instead cutting support for bereaved families—three in four bereaved families will receive less. That is utterly heartless.”

Mr Corbyn made reference to how the Budget failed to provide any provisions to support the future of skilled workers at Ford in Bridgend:

*“In the immediate term, the Chancellor must focus his attention—he did not have much to say about this—on the precarious future of skilled workers’ jobs at Vauxhall in Ellesmere Port and Luton, and at **Ford in Bridgend.**”*

WASPI

On International Women’s Day, as the Chancellor was delivering his Budget speech, women from across the UK were arriving in Parliament to lobby their MPs as part of the WASPI campaign. I met up with a group from the constituency, resplendent in suffragette style outfits.



The [Women Against State Pension Inequalities](#) (WASPI) campaigners are calling for Government action over a 2011 reform to the state pension which affects some women born in the 1950s as part of a move to equalise pension ages for men and women. However, many women argue they had not been appropriately informed about this change, so have been left worse off, with little time to prepare for it. The lobby was part of a long campaign against the injustice WASPI women are facing and it will continue. If you someone who has been affected by this and would like to share you story, please get in touch. The more examples we have to use to support this campaign, the more pressure we can put on the Government and fight this injustice.

Thursday

Thursday was [World Kidney Day](#), an opportunity to highlight how many people are waiting for a kidney transplant and the essential fundraising many local groups do, including KRUF in Porthcawl. I used [Business Questions](#) to do just that.



Today is World Kidney Day. May I ask the Leader of the House to do two things? First, will he join me in commending all the kidney support groups that raise funds for research? Last week, my group in Porthcawl gave more than £2,000 for psychological support for children with kidney failure. Secondly, three people die every day because of the lack of available transplants, so may we have a debate on the need to increase their availability for people who otherwise would die?

David Lidington (Leader of the House): *Although I cannot offer the debate in Government time, at least in the short term, there may be other opportunities of which the hon. Lady will be well aware. I am happy to endorse her tribute to the Porthcawl group and to other kidney support groups throughout the country, and to emphasise, as she did, the importance of ensuring that more transplants are available, and that donors are available to help people in need.*