



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT 13 - 17 November 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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This week was almost entirely focused on the important process of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. The two marathon debates over Tuesday and Wednesday were wide ranging and argued passionately on all sides. This will hopefully mean that the Bill is put into in proper shape in order to avoid chaos and confusion.

However, during these times it is important to not lose sight of the many issues Parliamentarians are elected to the House to address. With this in mind, I have also spent the week pursuing other issues, such as suicide prevention, bereavement support and asking questions on Kidney patient care and the hormone pregnancy test report published this week. As well as this, I met with Emmaus, an organisation helping homeless and ex-homeless people to turn their lives around.

This week was also an important one for the Defence Select Committee as we reintroduced the Arctic Sub-Committee as well as scrutinising the Government's implementation of the 2015 Security and Defence review.

Monday

Monday set the frame for the week with a busy day of business. The session was kicked off with [questions](#) to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

As well as an application for a debate on [Tax Avoidance and Evasion](#), the day saw the Presentation and Reading of the [Northern Ireland Budget](#), a potentially important step in keeping the political stability in Northern Ireland, whilst the talks carry on to reconstitute the devolved Assembly in Belfast.

However, the main focus of the day was firstly directed to the Foreign Secretary's response to an [urgent question](#) on the imprisonment of the dual British-Iranian national, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, by Iran.

[Emily Thornberry \(Islington South and Finsbury\) \(Lab\):](#)

...Secondly, last week the Foreign Secretary was asked several times to do one very simple thing, and that was simply to admit that he had made a mistake—not that his remarks had been taken out of context or misconstrued, but that they were simply wrong. He has, so far, refused to make that clear, and that refusal was compounded yesterday by his good friend the Environment Secretary. Even after all the debate on this issue, the Environment Secretary still, incredibly,



claimed that we “don’t know” why Nazanin is in Iran. We do.

It is not good enough. If it is a matter of pride that the Foreign Secretary is refusing to admit that he made a mistake, I feel bound to say to him that his pride matters not one ounce compared to Nazanin’s freedom. After a week of obfuscation and bluster, will he finally take the opportunity today to state simply and unequivocally, for the removal of any doubt either here or in Tehran, that he simply got it wrong?

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): I am more than happy to say again what I said to the right hon. Lady last week: yes, of course, I apologise for the distress and the suffering that have been caused by the impression that I gave that the Government believed—that I believed—that Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe was in Iran in a professional capacity. She was there on holiday, and that is the view of— [Hon. Members: “Say sorry!”] I do apologise, and of course I retract any suggestion that she was there in a professional capacity. Opposition Members must have heard that from me about a dozen times.



The right hon. Lady asked an important question about diplomatic protection and how that would work. She is absolutely right that that is a question that Richard Ratcliffe himself has raised with me. All I can say is that I will be answering Mr Ratcliffe. I cannot give her an answer today; I would rather answer Mr Ratcliffe in person. I am delighted to say that I am seeing him tomorrow, and I will be explaining the position on diplomatic protection. As I said last week, he has requested to come to Tehran. I do not know whether that will be possible, but we will see what we can do.

Following this urgent question, David Davis, the Secretary of State for Leaving The European Union made a [statement](#) on the progress of the latest round of talks in Brussels. In this statement, the Government tried to pre-empt the debates on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill coming in the following days. This was done by announcing that Parliament would have a vote on the final deal.

The day drew to a close with a motion for a Bill on [Parental Bereavement](#) and another on [Police Funding](#) in Bedfordshire.

Other Business

During the evening, I had the privilege of attending a reception for small and local charities organised by Lloyds Bank. At this reception I meet representatives of several different charities doing great work, including Emmaus, Care and repair and Hijinx, a Drama club working with kids with learning disabilities.

Tuesday

The normal business of Parliament was overshadowed by the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill debates. This was the first day of 8 and was a mammoth session of 8 hours debating lasting well into the night.

However, before this debate the House witnessed [questions](#) to the Secretary of State for Health, followed by the presentation of a [Bill](#) on the Registration of Marriage and a motion of leave to bring a [Bill](#) on the abolition of Hospital parking charges. An emergency [debate](#) on Tax Avoidance and Evasion was the pre-ambule before the main event of the European Union (withdrawal) Bill [debate](#).

As ever the issue of Brexit split parties and Members in the House. The first debate was largely focused on a few of the many amendments that have been tabled by Members from all parties.

The debate opened with the amendments that aim to set in stone the UK’s exit date from the European Union be-

ing discussed.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): *The right hon. Gentleman has been a political ally of mine in previous cross-party arrangements, but not on this occasion. He has dodged answering the perfectly serious point that the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) just put to him. As things stand, article 50 will take effect in March 2019 and we will leave. Anything in the Bill is superfluous to that. A problem could arise only if—and this is possible—28 member states all agree that they are near to a conclusion but that they require a few more days or weeks to settle it. Once we are going they will not want us to stay in much longer, because they will not want us around for the European Parliament elections. However, it would be utterly foolish if 28 Governments all agreed to extend the process and the British representative had to say, “But we’ve put into British law a timing that says, to the second, when we are actually leaving.” That seems to me a rather serious flaw in the proposed new clause.*



Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): *The right hon. and learned Gentleman is such a good lawyer, but I wish he had read my new clause, because it notes the day rather than the minute that we will leave. Despite all the encouragement from Members behind me, I was so anxious to withdraw what I said about my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) that I forgot to address his substantive point, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman has reminded me to do so. If we look over our whole history in Europe, we will see that the idea that we finish any negotiations other than at the very last minute is almost unheard of. By including the time, we will be saying, “You will have to begin your shenanigans the month before rather than the month after.”*

In conclusion, I am grateful for being allowed to move the second reading of this new clause, to remind people that it is part of a short exit Bill.

After a long tussle of arguments, the debate moved on to amendments meant to give the devolved legislatures more say in the process of leaving the EU.

These clauses went to a division which saw them voted down by significant majority.

Finally the debate moved to a discussion of transitional arrangements.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): *My hon. Friend is making some excellent points. Various businesses in my constituency and unions have pointed out the need for, and the benefits of, a transitional period. Does he, like me, feel that because of the Government’s actions we are sleepwalking towards a no-deal scenario that would have a catastrophic impact on our economy?*

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): *I fear that that scenario is beginning to loom on the horizon. We know the Prime Minister does not want that because she says she wants the transitional arrangement, but more flesh has to be put on the bones in terms of how the UK envisages the transition and at the European Council in December. If a transition deal is not signalled, with more flesh put on the bone in December, a lot of firms will say, not unreasonably, “We have to plan for a scenario in which we are not legally able to sell our services to the 500 million customers across the other 27 countries.” We hear that American corporations that currently have their base in London are looking at all sorts of convoluted branch-back arrangements, so that they can subsidarise back into the UK. This is getting terribly complicated and very expensive. Ultimately, all these issues will hit consumers and workers in the UK. It will have a very practical effect on the lives of many of our constituents.*

The debate went on deep into the night and saw several more Divisions before the close of business.

Defence Select Committee

This [week's](#) Defence Committee took evidence from witnesses from within the military and the civil service. They were questioned on the effect and implementation of the “refresh” of the 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review.

Members of the Committee were concerned about the implications of the Security review on the capacity of the Armed forces to do their job effectively and how the findings of the review were being implemented. (In order to keep up with the work of the Committee see [here](#))

Other Business

During the day, I met with the Health Minister, Jackie Doyle-Price MP to discuss research from the Samaritans which found that socioeconomic disadvantage is a key risk factor for suicidal behaviour. It was a productive meeting and the Minister was receptive about the Government taking placing a stronger emphasis on suicide prevention as an inequality issue. Furthermore, there was a consensus that a cross-governmental and multi-organisational approach to suicide prevention was needed to effectively drive suicide prevention strategies.

Wednesday

The relentless pace of the week continued into Wednesday. The morning started with oral [questions](#) to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and rounded off with [questions](#) to the Prime Minister. These two events came either side of an urgent question on the unfolding situation in [Zimbabwe](#) and a presentation of a [Bill](#) on Automatic voter registration.

The day was again, however, dominated by the second day of [debate](#) on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. The beginning of the debate focused on clauses aimed at incorporating EU law into UK law, through creating a new category of “retained EU Law”.



[Vicky Ford \(Chelmsford\) \(Con\)](#): I want to pick up my right hon. and learned Friend's point about consensus. As I understand it, new clause 55 is designed to send a clear message that the Government do not intend to lower standards for the environment, financial services or consumers without an open and transparent process. I have heard Ministers say from the Front Bench again and again that they do not intend to lower those important standards. Does he agree that that is an important message to give to our future trading partners in Europe?

[Mr Dominic Grieve \(Beaconsfield\) \(Con\)](#): I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. If we are to have a deep and special relationship, it is inconceivable that we could dilute the rights that have been created.

[Geraint Davies \(Swansea West\) \(Lab/Co-op\)](#): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

[Mr Grieve](#): I will give way, but then I want to bring my remarks to an end.

[Geraint Davies](#): On that point, can the right hon. and learned Gentleman envisage a point in the future—it could be a very short time away—when tariffs are imposed and economic circumstances are such that businesses demand reductions in cost? Businesses will turn to the four weeks' paid holiday, the 48 hours directive or anything else that will cut their costs, and the Government will be tempted to abolish those rights.

[Mr Grieve](#): I do not think I am quite as apocalyptic as the hon. Gentleman, because I happen to think that, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said in his speech yesterday, the idea that the UK suddenly wishes to translate itself into a country of no regulation and no protection at all is fanciful. I have never seen the smallest sign of that from any section of the public. Indeed, one of the things that brings us together as a nation is agreeing that quality of life matters while, at the same time, wishing to develop a cohesive society.

After several Divisions, the debate then ranged into areas such as animal sentience and environmental protection, all areas which will be effected by the broad range of this Bill.

***Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD):** Returning to the possible trade deal with the US, the Americans have already said that a condition of doing a trade deal with the UK is that we do not sign up to the EU's animal welfare standards.*

***Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con):** I will answer the intervention but, with respect, I do not think that that is directly relevant to the points that we are making. We will engage in talks on a free trade agreement with the United States, and there will be argy-bargy and give and take. My view and—I am so happy to say— that of the Secretary of State is that that will not involve lowering animal welfare standards or environmental standards. Another point to make is that we do not just sign up to European animal welfare standards; our standards are higher in many respects than those applied throughout the rest of the European Union. Our pig standards, for example, are higher than any other country in Europe, and that does come with problems.*

Defence Sub-Committee

This Wednesday saw the first sitting since the Election of the [Sub-Committee](#) concerned with Defence affairs in the [Arctic](#). The Arctic is a rapidly changing area in terms of Defence and the UK has a potentially influential role to place in this environment. The first sitting of the new Committee looked to pick up from the work prior to the Election by conducting a review of the progress made.

Other Business

I also met with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, David Gauke, about Supported Housing. I invited the Chief Executive of Emmaus, South Wales to join me in this meeting. Emmaus do fantastic work to help and support the homeless and formerly homeless people, their only Welsh Community being in Bridgend. Helen Hayes MP also joined this meeting. Helen co-chaired a joint inquiry of the Communities and Local Government and Work and Pensions Select Committees to look at the future of supported housing. Again, this was a very useful meeting to clarify the Government's plans on supported housing. We managed to offer a few suggestions to improve provisions for short-term housing accommodation and help reduce homelessness.

Thursday

[Questions](#) on Thursday were put to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport was asked a range of questions from Super-Fast broadband to football policing costs and cyber-attacks. This was followed by a questioning of the Attorney General.

These questions were followed by an [Urgent Question](#) on the issue of Hormone Pregnancy Tests dating back to the 1970s. A recently published report appeared suggest that there were no links between the tests and the problems experience by many people during and after pregnancy. Members were concerned that the study did not consider the evidence correctly and its focus was not on the issue at hand. I took the opportunity to raise the issue about the potential cover up which happened during the investigation.

***Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** Like the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), I am reminded of the contaminated blood inquiry, which is ongoing. In 1975, the regulator knew that there was a potential 5:1 risk of the drug causing deformity. They told the manufacturers but not the patients, and papers were deliberately destroyed by the chief scientist. It is deeply worrying to the families that there is not an open and transparent investigation into this matter. Does the Minister know whether the Berlin archive papers were examined as part of this inquiry, because they demonstrate the cover-up that has happened over many years?*



***The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Steve Brine):** No, I do not. I will write to the hon. Lady about that, but I can tell her that issues relating to the historical regulatory process were outside the scope and remit of this review.*



During Business Questions, I also took the opportunity to ask for a debate on the issue of dialysis treatment for kidney patients. One NHS trust has begun charging for the Transport to and from the Hospital and others are reportedly considering implementing this system. For a patient who needs this service up to 4 times a week, the cost could be very high and it is an issue Parliament needs to confront.

***Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** Kernow clinical commissioning group is to remove free transport for kidney dialysis patients, and instead introduce a financial and medical assessment. As chair of the all-party kidney group, may I ask for a debate on that as it is terrifying kidney dialysis patients?*

***The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** I encourage the hon. Lady to seek to ask a question during Health questions, or an Adjournment debate, to focus on that specific issue.*