



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT 12 - 16 March 2018

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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It has been as busy week of ups and downs in Parliament. The horrific attack in Salisbury set the tone for the week and overshadowed everything Members did.

At times such as this, party differences become much less significant when a genuine threat is made to all of us.

The week featured some robust debates and I was also pleased to see some further cross party consensus over the progress of Brexit and the direction the Country needs to take.

Elsewhere this week mental health played a prominent part. The All Party Group for Suicide and self harm prevention looked at steps taken in Bristol to reduce self harm and the work of Liaison Psychiatrists in A&E. I also Chaired a Westminster Hall debate highlighting the low level of availability of support for people with psychosis in England. You can read the debate [here](#).

Monday

The week began with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government answering Members [questions](#). This was followed by two Urgent Questions. The [first](#) of these dealt with Hate Crime, whilst the [second](#) was in regard to the treatment of House of Commons staff.

Salisbury Incident

The bulk of the time on Monday was taken up by a series of Statements from the Government. The first of these [Statements](#) was on the recent incident in Salisbury.

The overall consensus across the House was that Members should put party politics aside and deal with the issue at hand, the threat posed by Russian activity, to the UK.

***Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op):** Can I also commend the Prime Minister for her remarks? The last time we had a clear, defined, state-sponsored act of terrorism was in 2006, and she has referred to that. Can she have conversations with her predecessor, Tony Blair, who was Prime Minister at that time, about some of the issues that arose subsequent to the actions we took because it is clear that the Russians will retaliate and we will then be in a tit-for-tat process? They think we will back down. We have to say, resolutely and strongly, that we are not*



backing down. *This is an act of terrorism and all Members of Parliament should stand together.*

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. When we take action, we must ensure that it is action that we will continue to follow through. As I said in my statement, many of the actions taken in response to the Litvinenko murder are actually still in place in relation to our relations with the Russian state. Nobody should be in any doubt, however, of the likelihood of an impact from the Russian state in attempting to suggest, as it did in that case, that the information we put out is incorrect. The inquiry, which followed significantly later, very firmly put the responsibility for Litvinenko's murder at the door of the Russian state and, indeed, of President Putin.

The Government followed this with a [Statement](#) on the finances of Northern Ireland.

United States Tariffs: Steel and Aluminum

The recent announcement by the US Government of the increase on tariffs on steel and aluminum imports to the US prompted the Government to make another [Statement](#) to the House.

Members were primarily concerned with the protection of UK steel jobs and pressed the Secretary of State to give clarity on how the Government would protect British jobs.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): We all hope that these tariffs will not be imposed on 23 March, but if they are, what steps will the Government commit to taking in order to support steelmaking in this country and our steelmaking communities?

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox) That date, 23 March, is not quite the deadline that it might appear. My initial discussions with the US Department of Commerce and the Office of the United States Trade Representative have made it clear that the period of exemption will continue some way beyond the initial introduction. Clearly, if there are going to be exemptions for the EU or the UK, we would want to see them introduced as early as possible. We will continue to push for exemption on the basis that I have set out today.

A final [Statement](#) was then made on the Protection of Civilians in Afrin, a province of Syria which has seen fierce fighting in recent weeks.

The day in the Chamber ended with an Adjournment [Debate](#) on Respite Care for Vulnerable Adults.

Tuesday

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy was at the Dispatch Box to answer [Questions](#) on Tuesday morning.



Spring Statement

The main business of the day was the much anticipated [Spring Statement](#) from the Chancellor. None of the much speculated about surprises were presented, but Members were keen to question the Chancellor on claims that the Country had turned a corner and "light could be seen at the end of the tunnel".

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): The light that the Chancellor can see at the end of the tunnel is the Brexit locomotive barrelling headlong towards him, and towards our schools and hospitals. What will he do to prevent that free trade agreement-style scenario, which his own Treasury officials say will leave a £55 billion train wreck in our public services?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am committed to delivering a Brexit that protects British jobs, British

businesses and British prosperity, and I spend a significant amount of my working time ensuring that that is the route we follow. I expect that we will make further progress at the March European Council. I understand the concerns that he expresses on behalf of British businesses, but I talk to businesses all day, every day, because that is my job—[Interruption.] The shadow Chancellor says so does he, so he will know this already. Business is concerned about what the consequences of a bad Brexit deal could be, but business is much more concerned about the consequences of the policies advanced by his right hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench.

The House was then presented with two Bills for their First Reading. The [Bill](#) brought to the House first was on Housing and Planning. Whilst the second [Bill](#) was in relation to the Holocaust and the return of cultural objects.

Statutory Instruments (Motions to Annul)

The House then [debated](#) four Statutory Instruments and their proposed annulment. The first of these was on Universal Credit. This Motion came about over concerns that 1 million school children will lose access to free school meals. The issue was hotly debated in the Chamber.

[Catherine West \(Hornsey and Wood Green\) \(Lab\)](#): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Government did an assessment of the impact on childhood obesity prior to taking this statutory instrument through?

[Angela Rayner \(Ashton-under-Lyne\) \(Lab\)](#): My hon. Friend makes an important point, because childhood obesity is an important issue at the moment. The Children's Society found that 1 million children growing up in poverty will lose out on free school meals that they would have been entitled to. Incredibly, the Government have the audacity to claim that they are being generous. They want to pretend that no families will lose because the small numbers who are benefiting under universal credit will not lose out now.

[Rebecca Pow \(Taunton Deane\) \(Con\)](#): Is it not right that money should be placed where it is most needed? That is where we need the most support. When universal credit is fully rolled out, it is absolutely a fact that 50,000 more children will be getting free school meals. It is not right to mislead about this issue.



[Angela Rayner \(Ashton-under-Lyne\) \(Lab\)](#): I am sure that the hon. Lady does not believe that I am trying to mislead the House. Let me be absolutely clear: many people, including MPs, wrongly believe that all children in poverty already get free school meals. That is not currently the case. But under the transitional protections under universal credit, those 1 million children would be entitled to the benefit. Through the secondary legislation, the Government are pulling the rug from underneath those families.

The day in the Chamber ended with an Adjournment [Debate](#) on Hemel Hempstead Urgent Care Centre

Defence Committee

Away from the Chamber, the Defence Committee held another [evidence](#) session on the Modernising Defence Programme the Government is currently carrying out. I took the opportunity to question the witnesses of the difficulties of publishing stories on Defence matters.

[Mrs Madeleine Moon \(Bridgend\) \(Lab\)](#): Prior to the events in Salisbury, how difficult had you found it to get defence questions through your editors? Is there a case of the public being less aware because editors always say, "Oh, but there's a sexy story over here about something else." What is the difficulty of getting defence stories actually out to the public?

[Deborah Haynes, Defence Editor, The Times](#): It can be quite difficult, especially if it is a quite complex story. If you are talking about defence spending, that is a bit snoozy, and making it interesting can be difficult. My editor is him-

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self a former defence correspondent and has a real passion for defence, wanting to see a strong Britain and a strong Armed Forces. In that sense, I feel that he has really enabled me to have a platform so that I can write these stories. But they can be quite complex. If we are talking about a £20 billion black hole—what does that mean? Where does it come from? How are we going to fix it? Explaining that nuance and those intricacies can be quite difficult, because it is a bit of dry subject as opposed to someone on a bombing campaign against Syria.

Wednesday

The day in the Chamber began with [Questions](#) to the Secretary of State for Wales.

Prime Ministers Questions

Once again the NHS was at the centre of the questions put to the Prime Minister.



[Jeremy Corbyn \(Islington North\) \(Lab\)](#): I will indeed be writing to the Prime Minister about the case about which I am concerned. It relates to a man who has lived in this country for 44 years, has worked and paid his taxes—obviously, he is an older gentleman—and is now being denied cancer treatment. I suspect he is not alone in that, and I urge the Prime Minister to discuss the matter with the Home Office and others.

This week I received a letter from Hilary, a British pensioner—it is relevant to the point that the Prime Minister just made—who wrote:

“I am now having to pay for my thyroid medication because the CCG needs to save money. I have worked all my life, paid national insurance and... this is not fair”.

Last March, the Health Secretary said that

“it is absolutely essential that we...get back to the 95% target”

for accident and emergency waiting times, and that that should happen in

“the course of the next calendar year”.

Well, the calendar year is now up. Can the Prime Minister explain why that is no longer possible?

[The Prime Minister \(Mrs Theresa May\)](#): I look forward to receiving the details of the individual case from the right hon. Gentleman, but let me take this opportunity to remind him that I think he raised a case about Georgina with me last October and has not written to me about that. [Interruption.] As I have said, I look forward to receiving the details of the case that he has just raised.

What we have done in relation to cancer treatment is ensure that more diagnostic tests are taking place. More people with suspected cancer are being seen by specialists, and more people are starting treatment for cancer. That is why I say that we have seen an improvement in the cancer treatment that is available to people in this country.

I am pleased to say that we have more doctors working in accident and emergency departments. We have put more money in—the Chancellor announced this last year—both to deal with winter pressures and to ensure that those working in accident and emergency departments are able to provide the treatment that is right for the patient before them. Some people do not need to be admitted to hospital; they need to see a GP. We are working with the NHS to ensure that the treatment that patients receive is the treatment that is right for them.

Salisbury Incident: Further Update

The Prime Minister stayed at the Dispatch Box to give a [Statement](#) on further actions to be taken regarding the Salisbury Incident.

There was broad consensus across the House that the actions of the Russian Government are unacceptable and the vast majority of Members showed their support for the Prime Ministers actions. I took the opportunity to call on the Government make it clear that the UK would not tolerate these actions.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): *The Prime Minister has rightly said that the attacks in Britain have been part of an ongoing contempt for Britain, contempt for the rule of law, and contempt for our values. There has also been a contempt for our alliances, both political and military. Will the Prime Minister work with those political and military alliances, so that together we can bring about a root-and-branch removal of Russian interference in our political, educational and financial institutions? Let this be a marker: no more. Now they will fear what we will do to hit back at the interference that they have shown us.*



The Prime Minister: *I thank the hon. Lady for the commitment that she has shown, as a parliamentarian, to the alliance that we have through NATO, which is very important to us. It is the bedrock of European defence. I can certainly say that we will continue to work through those alliances to ensure that we are sending a very clear message that this is not acceptable.*

This exchange was followed by a further statement on [Integrated](#) Communities. A [Bill](#) on Supervised Drug Consumption Facilities was then presented to the House.

European Affairs

A general [Debate](#) on European Affairs was then hosted in the Chamber. This was the first day of debating on this topic. The day was dedicated to the subject of international trade.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): *The Minister is right to pay tribute to his Department's staff. Has he noted the comments of the Department's recent former permanent secretary to the effect that, if we are to leave the European Union, non-EU trade will not make up for the loss of trade that we currently enjoy with the EU? Secondly, the Secretary of State was part of a campaign that promised that we would start negotiating new trade agreements with other non-EU countries as soon as we voted to leave. How many of those new trade agreements are being negotiated right now?*

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): *The hon. Gentleman knows full well that this is not an either/or situation: it is not a choice between having trade with the European Union or with the rest of the world. The Government's objectives are clear, namely, to secure a deep and comprehensive partnership with the European Union while still being able—crucially, outside of the customs union—to pursue an independent trade policy and to secure those agreements with the rest of the world.*

On what was said during the campaign, the Department for International Trade has the capability in place and we have built up the Department. I have mentioned the 14 trade working groups. We are clearly not able to carry out a trade negotiation while we are still members of the European Union, but the hon. Gentleman seems to be demanding that we have those negotiations while at the same time saying that we should stay in the EU, which would prevent us from having the negotiations in the first place.

The day in the Chamber ended with an Adjournment [Debate](#) on Banking in North Ayrshire.

Thursday

[Questions](#) were put to the Secretary of State for Leaving the European Union to begin the day. The questioning ranged from the progress of the negotiations to fisheries. The main focus fell once again to the ongoing saga of the Northern Irish Border.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): *Given that the Government have said the border will remain friction*



free or frictionless, and that there will be no border in the Irish sea, the question many of us continue to ask is how can this happen?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Suella Fernandes): The Government have made clear their unwavering commitment to three guiding principles in relation to Northern Ireland and the Republic: there should be no hard border between north and south; the Belfast agreement must be honoured; and the constitutional and economic integrity of the United Kingdom must remain unimpaired. The Prime Minister set out, most recently in her Mansion House speech, how that might be achieved. We are also building on the options set out in the August position papers, which set out practical options for how we might take this forward.

Questions were followed by the [Business of the House](#) before two Statements from the Government.

The first [Statement](#) was on Building Safety and the [second](#) was on the Government's response to the ongoing crisis in Burma.

European Affairs

The second day of [debate](#) on European Affairs saw attention shift to finances and economics.

I took the opportunity to highlight the threat the Government's Brexit position represents to the economy and jobs in Wales.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): It was wonderful to hear the speech by the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). I cannot say how much I agree with her about how much this House knows that what we are working towards will be an absolute unmitigated disaster for our constituents. Every one of us in the House, apart from the tiny minority who are driving this disastrous move forward, is absolutely clear that we are going to leave our country and our constituents poorer. It will be a disaster.

I have to say to the hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) that it is nonsense to say that when the facts change, one does not change one's opinion. Were that true, there would be no divorce. It would mean saying to every woman in the House, "You would never be able to take back that dress that you thought was wonderful when you first saw it but that looked an absolute unmitigated disaster when you got it home." The facts are changing and we are finally getting to the truth of the disaster of where we are going, so it is right that we go back to the people and say, "Do you want to change your mind? Is this the right direction?"

The impact on London will be tremendous, as we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander), but I cannot begin to talk about how disastrous it will be for Wales. May I start with the issue of gross value added? Gross value added is one of those terms that does not really resonate with constituents, but let us look at what it means in Wales. In 2016, it was £59.6 billion. The Government's projections mean that Wales would lose about £5.7 billion in the event of no deal, and around £3.3 billion if we secure a trade agreement. That is over a period of about 15 years, but it will have a huge impact on the Welsh economy. It is not the most vibrant economy, but it will have a devastating impact.

I could throw lots of figures about, but one that impacts on families across my constituency is inflation. Inflation remains at 3%. Wages are not going up, but prices are, and my families are becoming worse off. The cost of food and other goods is soaring as a result of the fall in the value of the pound, which remains about 15% below pre-referendum levels. That is a visible and very real impact on the daily lives of my constituents. Having seen that impact, my constituents deserve the right to another opportunity to decide whether this is a bet that they want to take

given that, even under the Government's own policies and analysis, it will bring further poverty, further disaster and limited opportunities for their children.

I have talked to many of my constituents about how they voted. Some of them say, yes, they got a great result. They got the result that they wanted out of the referendum; they got rid of David Cameron—job done. That is what they have actually said to me. It was not about Europe; it was about austerity. They hated what was happening to their families. They hated the fact that so many of them were heading off to food banks. Some of them say, yes, it was about immigration, but really it was about the wages that they were getting and the 1% pay rise that, year on year, meant that they and their families were falling behind.

For many of them, it was about taking back control. They would say to me, "These unelected bureaucrats", and I would say, "Well, okay, but tell me the name of the director of education in Bridgend County Borough Council." They would say, "What? I don't know, Mrs Moon." Well, that is an unelected bureaucrat. It is not who the bureaucrats are that we need to know; it is who the politicians are. It is the politicians who hold those bureaucrats to account and it is the politicians who make the decisions. It is about knowing who our politicians are and getting behind them that is the important part of democracy.

A grim time lies ahead. Most businesses constantly approach MPs to say that if we leave the customs union there will be severe consequences, which makes me really, really nervous. I have two major employers at two ends of my constituency: the Ford engine plant and Tata Steel. The impact on both the car industry and the steel industry will be devastating when we leave the European Union. I cannot begin to talk about the impact that job losses in those two industries will have on my constituents. I cannot begin to talk about the loss of future opportunities for the children in my constituency. I have fantastic schools and I am so proud of the bright, alert, really eager youngsters for whom we should, as a country, be promoting a future of opportunity, instead of which I hear fantasies about wonderful trade deals with countries that will never, ever bring the benefits—I ask Members to read the submission from Tata Steel—that access to the European markets currently brings to Tata Steel.



Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): *The hon. Lady is making a very important speech. I suggest that my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) visits her constituency, and talks to Ford and Tata Steel in order to understand the importance of frictionless supply chains, membership of the customs union and membership of the single market in the very real industrial world that the hon. Lady and her constituents inhabit.*

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): *I thank the right hon. Lady for saying that, because I have those conversations all the time.*

When I trotted over to DExEU to read the wonderful insight reports that we were meant to see, I was absolutely appalled by the poor quality of analysis that would be devastating for the people I represent. I will not vote for anything in this House that I think will damage the people I represent. I feel awful guilt—the right hon. Member for Broxtowe also mentioned this—about having voted for that referendum without insisting that we had all these debates before we took it to the people. I recently attended one of my local Women's Institutes, where a lady said to me, "We shouldn't have been asked to vote, should we? I didn't really know what I was voting for. I went with what everybody else was saying, but I didn't really understand the consequences, and now I'm worried about my grandchildren." We should all be worried about those grandchildren.

So here we are. It is really quite obvious that we are not going to have frictionless trade. If we leave the single market and the customs union, we are going to make sure that our families are worse off. Europe is on our doorstep. We can get from here into the centre of Europe in a matter of hours. The EU has 37 trade deals with more than 65 countries around the world, covering 15% to 17% of the UK's trade in goods. The EU has trade deals in place with more countries than the US, which has 20; China, which has 23; and Australia, which has 19. And yet, what are we going to do? We are going to throw that away.

Finally, I am a Member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Every time I attend a meeting, colleagues there tell me of their fear of the consequence of Britain's departure for the stability of Europe. Every time I see them they ask me, "Is there any chance?" I just hope to God that we wake up in time and say, "Yes, there's a chance."

The day in the Chamber came to a close with an Adjournment [Debate](#) on CERN Pensions: UK Tax Treatment.

Friday

Another sitting Friday saw a series of Private Members Bills to be debated.

Refugees (Family Reunion) (No.2) Bill

The first [Bill](#) to be read be the House was on the reunion of refugees with their families in the UK. Much attention has been given to this Bill. The Bill passed its Second Reading without Division meaning it will now go through Committee Stage to be more closely scrutinised.



[Dr Philippa Whitford \(Central Ayrshire\) \(SNP\)](#): Does my hon. Friend agree that we should focus on our common humanity? In January, I presented a petition from two of my primary schools, St Patrick's and Symington. Their pupils had done a project putting themselves in the position of child refugees. They had drawn little suitcases with what they would take—what was most precious to them. What struck me was that in every suitcase was a photograph of their family. We should be doing the same as that, and if we are a bit too old to imagine ourselves as children, we should imagine the help and support we would wish someone to give our children if they were in this circumstance.

[Angus Brendan MacNeil \(Na h-Eileanan an Iar\) \(SNP\)](#): My hon. Friend makes a compelling point. We could think about our children and grandchildren, and we can look back at our own history. My background is highlands Scottish and Irish, and in the last century highlands Scots and Irish were certainly in need of help from many people as they were pushed and moved across areas of the world.

I was talking about Canterbury and saying it can be proud: the people of Canterbury can hold their heads up high.

Unpaid Trial Work Periods (Prohibition) Bill

The next Private Members [Bill](#) to be brought before the House was on unpaid trial work periods seeking to make the practice of employers giving potential employees unpaid trial periods illegal. The debate was adjourned before a decision could be reached and will be brought in front of the House once more at a future date.

[Gordon Marsden \(Blackpool South\) \(Lab\)](#): The hon. Gentleman is being extremely gracious. I congratulate him—as I am sure do most Members in this House—on bringing this Bill before us today. We have just had National Apprenticeship Week. Not least of the evils of the present situation, is that, first, it prevents the sort of serial offenders that he is describing from doing something decent such as offering an apprenticeship, and secondly, it hides them from exposure for not taking such things forward in the first place.

[Stewart Malcolm McDonald \(Glasgow South\) \(SNP\)](#): The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point and we are better informed for it. There cannot be a Member of the House who did not celebrate National Apprenticeship

On the back of that, if nothing else, this matter certainly merits Parliament's attention this afternoon.

The day in the Chamber ended with an Adjournment [Debate](#) on Dulwich Hamlet Football Club.