



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT 21 - 25 May 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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The week turned out busier than it first appeared. The lack of large legislation moving through the House lulled us all into a false sense of security. However, the time has allowed me to focus on other and equally important issues.

I had the opportunity to speak at a symposium on suicide. A very productive meeting which allowed experts in the field to come together and discuss ways in which we can improve our systems and increase prevention and help for those who need it.

On the Defence side of things, the Secretary of State came before the Defence Committee, allowing us to dig deeper into the Government's plans for our Armed Forces and our place within NATO. A very useful session for myself as I head off to Poland this weekend for a meeting of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

Monday

Questions to the Secretary of State For Work and Pensions

The Minister was put through their paces to begin the week. Questions ranging from Child Tax Credits and Social Mobility. An area of particular contention the Government was questioned on was the effect on people the roll out of the PIP system has had, especially so in terms of mental health.



Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The Secretary of State accepted that there was a failure of assessment of people with mental health conditions and said that this would be remedied, but we have been told by our job centre that guidance has not changed, and a young man who is suffering from appalling post-traumatic stress disorder in my constituency is still being treated as if he does not qualify. When will guidance actually change? We are still producing more injustices.

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton): As I said in answer to an earlier question, we insist and make sure that the healthcare professionals undertaking the assessments are appropriately trained and have the right expertise, and the guidance is kept under constant review to make sure we get it right first time.

The Government then responded to an Urgent Question on Tower Block Cladding.

Gaza: UN Human Rights Council Vote

The UK decided to abstain from a vote in the UN Human Rights Council on an investigation into recent events in Gaza. An [Urgent Question](#) was put to the Government to ask why.

***The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt):** First, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question.*

We abstained on calls for a commission of inquiry into recent violence in Gaza during the UN Human Rights Council session on Friday. The substance of the resolution was not impartial and it was unbalanced. We could not support an investigation that refused to explicitly examine the action of non-state actors such as Hamas. An investigation of that kind would not provide us with a comprehensive assessment of accountability. It would risk hardening positions on both sides and move us further away from a just and lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



However, the United Kingdom continues to fully support the need for an independent and transparent investigation into recent events. We call directly on Israel to carry out a transparent inquiry into the Israeli Defence Forces' conduct at the border fence and to demonstrate how this will achieve a sufficient level of independence. We believe this investigation should include international members. We urge that the findings of such an investigation be made public, and, if wrongdoing is found, that those responsible are held to account. The Foreign Secretary stressed the importance of Israel conducting an independent investigation when he spoke to Prime Minister Netanyahu on 16 May.

A [Statement](#) from the Speaker followed to clarify the widely reported comments made in the Chamber last week. The House then moved on to an [Emergency Debate](#) on Private Members' Bills: Money Resolutions.

Members then Read for a [Second time](#) the Tenant Fees Bill.

A [Motion](#) on the Health and Social Care (National Data Guardian) Bill was chiefly about the allocation of money to ensure that the Bill could be properly implemented.

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

National Security Strategy Committee

This Joint [Committee](#) held an [evidence](#) session looking into Critical National Security Infrastructure. Taking evidence from a range of witnesses from both the private and public sphere, the Committee was particularly interested in cybersecurity.

***Lord Powell of Bayswater:** I have one last question on this sector. Particularly in the light of Mr Crook's slightly pessimistic summary, do all four of you generally think that the cyber skills gap is going to get worse, or are you beginning to make ground on it?*

***Mr Elliot Rose, Digital Trust Cyber and Security, PA Consulting Group:** We are making ground on it. There is still a lot of work to be done. We are in the fourth industrial revolution, and with digital skills and advances in machine learning and AI we will see much more automation coming forward. We need to anticipate that and think about how our skills grow and evolve. They will become much more specialised. The gap is in the volume. We are trying to deal with that volume and the complexity, and we are starting to see a revolution in automation around some of this stuff.*

Tuesday**Questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer**

The House had the chance to [question](#) the Chancellor on Tuesday morning. Enquiries from Members ranged between Tax Evasion, New Technologies and the Cost of Living. Overarching everything, however, were questions on Economic growth and the UK's poor levels of Productivity.

[Preet Kaur Gill \(Birmingham, Edgbaston\) \(Lab/Co-op\)](#): Eurostat figures show regional inequality in the United Kingdom, measured by output per hour, to be the worst in Europe, and the Government have failed to close the gap since 2010. When will the Chancellor commit himself to making the investment that is needed to end regional imbalances that have seen the north of England set to receive just one fifth of the transport investment per capita in London?

[The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury \(Robert Jenrick\)](#): The Infrastructure and Projects Authority, which has conducted the most rigorous analysis of Government spending on infrastructure, has made clear that the north of England will receive more funds from the present Government than any other region in the United Kingdom, including London and the south-east.

The House then heard the Government's response to an [Urgent Question](#) on Transport Emissions: Urban Areas.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

A further [Urgent Question](#) was put to the Government on what progress had been made in securing the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe from prison in Iran following reports that she may face extra charges from the Iranian authorities.



[Tulip Siddiq \(Hampstead and Kilburn\) \(Lab\)](#): Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker. I thank the Minister for his update, and I have a few questions for him. Will the Government make it clear today that they will condemn the new charges brought against my constituent and call for her immediate release? Ministers have said that they will not provide a running commentary on the case, but when we met the Foreign Secretary in November, he promised that he would leave no stone unturned. I press the Minister to update the house on how his strategy is being conducted in practice.

Will the Minister update the House on whether the historic debt owed by Britain to Iran has been paid, and when is the next court date scheduled? Nazanin spoke to our ambassador to Iran after meeting the judge, and she requested that he sign a formal letter of protest to the Iranian Government. Will the Minister confirm that this constitutes an overdue acceptance from the Iranian judiciary that Nazanin is indeed British? Will he say whether he anticipates that this will lead to further consular protections being granted? Will he today confirm that the ambassador will send the note of protest that Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe has requested? Will the Minister press the Iranian authorities to allow Nazanin temporary release to spend Gabriella's—her daughter who went with her to Iran—fourth birthday with her?

I finish by saying that I bring these questions to the House in good faith. All we want in West Hampstead is for Nazanin to return home. All our constituents, including her husband, Richard, who is in the Public Gallery today, believe that Nazanin is innocent. She is British, and she deserves to know what her Government are doing to secure her release and to reunite her with her families back home.

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***The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt):** I refer to remarks I made earlier about how we intend to conduct the case and the answers that I can give to the hon. Lady's questions. We remain of the assessment that a private, rather than public, approach is most likely to result in progress in Nazanin's case and ultimately, her release, which is all any of us want.*

I can answer one or two questions. On diplomatic protection, the FCO is in discussion with Mr Ratcliffe and his legal representatives on the merits of a claim for diplomatic protection. It would be remiss of me to comment any further until these discussions have concluded. I am not making any comments about the charges or anything similar.

As I have said, our ambassador spoke to Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe on Sunday. He assured her that we continue to prioritise the case and do everything we can to bring about her release, including requesting consular access, requesting access to medical reports and requesting a temporary furlough so that she can indeed celebrate Gabriella's birthday with her family.

On the International Military Services issue, we do not share the view that the IMS debt or any other bilateral issue is the reason for Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's detention. The UK has always been clear, both publicly and in private discussions with Iran, that the two issues are entirely separate, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has publicly stated on several occasions that there is no link. We will meet our legal obligations in relation to the debt, and funding to settle the debt was transferred to the High Court several years ago.

The First Reading of a [Bill](#) on the Social Justice Commission was then brought before the House, followed by a [General Debate](#) on a Serious Violence Strategy.

The day in the Chamber ended with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on Fuel Laundering.

Westminster Hall

Away from the Chamber, Westminster Hall hosted a [debate](#) on Job Losses in the UK Automotive Industry. Given the importance of the Industry in South Wales, I took the opportunity to speak.

***Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** This is a very personal debate for me, because my Ford engine plant employs over 1,760 people and has 12,000 jobs associated with it. The plant covers the equivalent of 17 rugby pitches—we view size in that way in Wales. It produces one of five different engines every 30 seconds, and those go into seven different Ford models. Leaving the customs union means that the engines sent to European assembly plants will attract a 4.5% tariff, and it will inevitably lead to increased cost to consumers and loss of sales, leading to further loss of jobs.*

Those of us who watch the automotive industry are concerned about the impact of Brexit and the confusion of Government policy on clean diesel. Changing diesel sales have not translated into petrol sales, and consumers are holding on to older products—cars and vans—for longer, slowing down air improvements. The Bridgend engine plant is a great example of the complex and integrated automotive supply chain across the EU.

There are a number of things we must be absolutely clear about. The Bridgend engine plant can be counted under originated content under the EU's rules of origin. Components flow from the EU into Bridgend, and engines flow back. That must continue unimpeded. A frictionless customs regime is essential for us. Mass producers such as the car industry, as we have already heard, need the just-in-time delivery principle. A 15-minute delay to parts delivered



just in time can cost over £850,000 a year. Storage of stock just increases customer costs, as the cost knock-on to the car manufacturer is passed on to the consumer. We need zero-tariff trade; that is a minimum requirement and should form the basis of any trade deal for the future.

We have already heard reference to minimum customs costs and delay in moving goods. Regulatory alignment—a prerequisite for minimising customs delays—is crucial in preventing cumulative cost and restricted customer choice as a result of trying to meet different standards. Ford would be especially impacted by a change of type approval if the VCA certification was no longer approved in the EU, and by CO₂ targets if the UK was not included post 2020 in EU-wide calculations. Preferential trade with third countries, including Ford's trade flow with Turkey, facilitated by the EU-Turkey customs union, and with South Africa through the EU-South Africa free trade agreement, is important to the European business.

I will end by saying that Bridgend has seen the loss of jobs in steel manufacturing. Bridgend has seen the loss of jobs in coal. We do not wish to see further devastation to the constituency from the loss of jobs in the automotive trade.

Defence Committee

The Secretary of State for Defence was in front of the Defence [Committee](#) this week to answer [questions](#) on the UK's involvement in NATO and the commitment of the US. I took the chance to question the Minister on the division of labour in NATO, and the UK's priorities in protecting our *interests*.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): *Secretary of State, I do not think anyone on the Committee would disagree with the emphasis you have put on the UK's responsibility for the safety of the north Atlantic. I suggest you look at the evidence from Mr Sedwill, because his emphasis was quite different from yours. He believed that it was a NATO responsibility, not a British responsibility, to ensure that our borders were safe.*

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP, Secretary of State for Defence: *As members of NATO, we obviously all work together to make sure that not just the north Atlantic but the Mediterranean and the North sea are safe. I know that all of the Government are very committed to making sure we continue to deliver a very safe north Atlantic. Britain has always and will continue to play a pivotal role in doing that, but it is incredibly good to have the support of some amazing allies and to be working together with them to achieve those aims.*

Wednesday

Prime Ministers Questions

The Secretary of State for International Development preceded the Prime Minister this week, once she had been [questioned](#) by Members, the [Prime Minister](#) stepped up to the Dispatch Box. The NHS was high up on the agenda this week.



Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): *The shadow Health Secretary is dedicated to the NHS, not to handing it over to private contractors. That is the difference.*

The Care Quality Commission said last year that

“there is too much poor care”.

A fifth of care providers require improvement. Year after year, private sector care providers are letting down our elderly.

This year is the 70th birthday of the national health service—I pay tribute to all its staff over all of those 70 years—but the NHS reaches that milestone with the worst A&E waits on record, the worst delays for cancer referrals on record, falling numbers of GPs, falling numbers of nurses and the longest funding squeeze in its history,

while this Government open the door to even more profiteering. Why does the Prime Minister not act now to end the siphoning off of billions of pounds from patient care, and give the NHS the funding it needs?

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): We do indeed pay tribute to all those who have worked in the NHS over its 70 years and those who work there today. We want to see a bright future for the NHS, which is why we will be coming forward with a long-term plan for it. What we see today is a national health service not only with more funding going into it, but, crucially, with more people being treated and more operations being undertaken. There are people alive today who have suffered from cancer and would not have been alive just eight years ago, because our cancer outcomes have improved. That is the reality of our national health service. What we also see is that this Government can put money into the NHS only because we have a balanced approach to our economy. What did we learn this week that the Labour party and the shadow Chancellor want to do? They want to “overthrow capitalism”. What would that mean? It would mean families paying higher taxes—[Interruption.] It is supported by parts of the Labour party; now we know where the Labour party really stands on this issue. I say to the shadow Chancellor and others: what would this mean? It would mean families paying higher taxes; more debt for our children in future; fewer people in jobs; and less money for our schools and hospitals. A Labour party that would bankrupt our economy would do lasting damage to our national health service.

The House was then presented with a Ten minute rule [Bill](#) on Terminal Illness (Provision of Palliative Care and Support for Carers).

Opposition Day

Two Opposition Day debates this week, the [first](#) focused on the East coast Franchise following the Secretary of State for Transport’s announcement last week that the Franchise would be taken back under Government control.

NHS Outsourcing and Privatisation

The second [debate](#) brought the focus back to the NHS, the debate was intended to force the Government to release papers regarding the reform of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, on the creation of accountable care organisations in the NHS, and on the effect of outsourcing and privatisation in the NHS including the creation of wholly-owned subsidiary companies.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Of course, A&E waiting times would not be as long if the Government were investing properly in primary care. In my borough, we have the ludicrous situation of private companies advertising in London underground stations, saying:

“Fed up waiting? Our private GPs can see you now...ONLY £80”.

Does my hon. Friend agree that people should not be forced to pay £80 to see a GP, and they should not be waiting unnecessarily long in A&E because of the Government’s failure properly to fund and deliver the workforce that primary care needs?

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. The problem is that, when the Government allow our national health service to deteriorate by such a scale and push it into this level of crisis, they are essentially forcing people, often reluctant refugees from a public NHS, into self-pay options. That is what happened last time the Conservatives were in government and it is happening again.



The day in the Chamber ended with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on Accrington Victoria Walk-in Centre.

Westminster Hall

Away from the Chamber, Westminster Hall hosted a [debate](#) on Leaving the EU: Higher Education in Wales. Given that a large amount of funding for higher education institutions in Wales comes from the EU, Members expressed concern about the access to these funds and wished to question the Government on its commitment to replace the funding.

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): *I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Does he agree that we are already seeing a financial impact of Brexit on our universities, in the reduction of the number of EU students? The excellent University of South Wales in my constituency had to propose laying off fully 5% of its staff last year, explicitly citing Brexit and the reduction in the number of EU students as the reason.*

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): *The hon. Gentleman makes a very telling point—the effects are with us already, even though we are still in.*

There are also effects that are not so apparent in facts and figures, which are to do with the morale of lecturers and students from abroad and perhaps even their commitment to their work, in the face of offers that they might get from universities outside Wales and outside the UK. That effect is beginning to make itself apparent. In fact, it is one of the early signs of the impending Brexit vote hangover.

Exiting the European Union Committee

The [Committee](#) held a further evidence session on the progress of the negotiations, this week taking evidence from two of the Ministers of the Department for Exiting the European Union.

Thursday

Thursday began with the Secretary of State for Transport being [questioned](#) by Members.

Marks & Spencer

The Government then answered an [Urgent Question](#) about Marks & Spencer. Members were concerned about the recent drop in profits in the company leading to risks of job losses.



Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): *It cannot be fair for our high street retailers to have to compete with online companies that offshore themselves for tax purposes and often use the most exploitative employment practices, such as minimum hours contracts. The Government have to act more urgently to deal with this problem. Does the Minister really think that if an employee loses their job at Marks & Spencer and goes to work for a company like Amazon, they will be given the same rate of pay?*

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): *The hon. Gentleman flags up the reason that the Government commissioned the Taylor review on the future of good work: clearly, the workplace is changing. The expectation, and it has been pleasing to hear Marks & Spencer talk about this, is that it will do everything it can to redeploy its workforce, particularly into stores nearby that might be transitioning to food. I have been very struck on my forays into M&S by its incredible investment in its workforce—its commitment to increasing diversity and to providing good jobs over the long term—and we must*

all work to make sure that those jobs continue.

The Leader of the House then came to the Dispatch Box for this week's [Business](#). The Leader was followed by two Statements, the first regarding [Carillion](#).

Northern Ireland

The second [Statement](#) was made by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in regard to Devolution in Northern Ireland. The Statement was taken from the Committee's recent report on how to restore the Devolved Legislature.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): *This week marks 20 years since the people of Northern Ireland endorsed the Good Friday agreement. The Committee is right to say that power-sharing devolution is the best structure and that the absence of the Assembly is impacting on daily lives. That is why everyone should be focused on getting devolution back up and running. Will the Chair confirm that as the Good Friday agreement was endorsed by the people of Northern Ireland, any changes to it need to be by the expressed wish of the people and political leaders of Northern Ireland?*

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He is, of course, absolutely right. We practically say that on every single line of our report, because it is vital that we understand the tenets of the Good Friday agreement. It has a unique status. It was a remarkable achievement and is, of course, held dear in the hearts of those who have benefited from it over the past 20 years. Anything that is done needs to be done with consent, and that runs like a vein through the report that we published this week.

Backbench Business this week focused on to a [Motion](#) on the Ahmaddiyya Muslim Community. The day in the Chamber then ended with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on Northern Rail Timetable Changes.

Westminster Hall

Westminster Hall hosted a debate on the Humanitarian Situation in Gaza following on once again from the protests there. Questions about the Government not supporting an investigation by the UN Human Rights Council surfaced once again.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Can I just seek some clarification? Do the Government not support the Human Rights Council undertaking an independent investigation, because of some of the concerns the Minister has just outlined, or do they not support the resolution that was drafted by the Human Rights Council? If it is the latter, will the Government work with the other countries that abstained, which he mentioned, to draft a new resolution and ensure that a truly independent investigation can go forward?

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): Our concern was about the resolution itself. We worked with other parties to see whether we could get a resolution that would be acceptable. I genuinely do not know whether it is possible to reopen that, because a decision seems to have been taken. If people were going to change the resolution, it would have been changed at the time.

Let me say this about what is happening now. The UK is not required formally to take any further action or position on the HRC-mandated inquiry until the final report is published, but as supporters of commissions of inquiry in general, we will encourage parties to engage constructively with the HRC and its mechanisms. At the same time, we will work to ensure that the commission of inquiry is as independent, transparent and balanced as possible in its approach.