



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT 04 - 08 June 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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This week was a final chance to draw breath before the return of the European Union Withdrawal Bill to the House of Commons next week.

The steady flow of briefings and information regarding the Withdrawal Bill which peppered the week provided a good grounding whilst allowing me to pursue other important matters. I had the opportunity to attend and host several important meetings on Defence, and a closed session of the Defence Committee was an ideal time to update Members on my recent visits with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

I also Chaired a Delegated legislation Committee on Immigration and the detention of vulnerable persons, another opportunity to reflect on the way the Country is run and is viewed by the world.

Monday

Parliament returned after Recess with the Home Secretary at the Dispatch Box to answer Members [Questions](#).

Personal Independence Payments

Home Office Questions were swiftly followed with an [Urgent Question](#) on Personal Independence Payments and the absurd level appeals which many claimants with chronic conditions have had to endure.



***Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** I chair two all-party parliamentary groups: on motor neurone disease and on Parkinson's. Research conducted by the groups, in conjunction with the charities, on the transition from DLA to PIP has shown that 25% of people with motor neurone disease—a progressive, degenerative, life-ending condition—had a reduction when transitioning to PIP. It also showed that 25% of those with Parkinson's lost some or all of their benefit, but that 70% of those people had it returned on appeal. How can the Secretary of State say that the system is working when this disaster is being faced by very ill people?*

***The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey):** As I have said throughout, we look to get things right first time, but we have processes in place. If things are not right, there is a reconsideration process, and if that is not right, there is an appeal process. Cases are usually turned around because*

people bring in extra medical information, and more people are getting the higher rate than ever before. The hon. Lady is quite right, however, that we need to be able to give people the support that they need.

US Steel and Aluminum Tariffs

Following the US announcement that tariffs on European steel and Aluminum would be imposed on exports to the US, the Government came to the House to make a [Statement](#). Members were keen to know how the Government planned to deal with an increasingly protectionist US.

***Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab):** Is not the gist of the International Trade Secretary's position that the US is behaving outrageously—with illegal, protectionist tariffs—so he is working with our EU partners to build a strong, sensible response with the collective weight of the EU, yet he also wants to rip up the customs and trade deal with the countries that agree with us in exchange for a future, potential trade deal with a country that clearly does not agree with us? When he said last year:*

"I want the UK and USA together to lead the world as shining beacons of open trade",

was that a complete and utter fantasy?

***The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox):** The United States has long been at the forefront of leading global free trade, including setting up the WTO itself. That is why we find it so disappointing that the current Administration should take this particular route and try this particular remedy for the problem. The right hon. Lady will notice that being a member of the European Union has no more protected us from these tariffs than Mexico or Canada.*



The House then moved on to hear a [Statement](#) on Rail Timetabling and a further [Statement](#) on Nuclear Power.

A [Motion](#) to hold an emergency debate on Abortion in Northern Ireland followed, before the House moved on to consider the Ivory [Bill](#).

The Day in the Chamber ended with an Adjournment [Debate](#) on Geothermal Energy.

Public Accounts Committee

The Committee held an evidence [session](#) looking into the issue of skills shortages in the Armed Forces, taking [evidence](#) from the MoD and Members of the Armed Forces. The difficulties in recruitment were highlighted by the Committee.

***Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab):** I understand that you will not get the numbers of regulars you need until 2022. Why is it taking as long as that to get to the levels you set as a target some time ago?*

***Stephen Lovegrove, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence:** We have a difficult recruitment environment, and some of the proposals and procedures we put in place to improve it have not worked as well as we would have liked them to. I am sure you will ask questions about the Capita contract in particular later on. It does take a while. There is a stock and flow issue associated with the Army, and Lieutenant General Nugee will no doubt tell you when the last time was that the Army was fully manned—it was a very, very long time ago. We will need time to be able to fix this problem.*

Tuesday

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

Airports National Policy Statement

The Transport Secretary came to the House to make a [Statement](#) on the Government's decision to approve a third runway for Heathrow.

Members were keen to ensure that the benefits of expansion were spread fairly across the country.



***Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab):** I welcome the statement, and the Secretary of State's acceptance of the points made by the Transport Committee. We look forward to examining the detail in the final national policy statement. We said that an expanded Heathrow must deliver for the whole of the UK, not just the south-east of England. Can the Secretary of State explain how public service obligations can guarantee that a new runway will result in more domestic routes which will be distributed fairly across the regions and nations of the UK, and can he tell us how this proposal fits in with his Department's plans for high-speed rail connectivity between cities in the midlands and the north?*

***The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** Let me deal with the last point first. I think that we will need both. Creating a rapid link between our great cities is a necessary part of doing business domestically, and that will mean connectivity to airports as well. However, I think that the real benefit of expanding the runway is the linkage that results from the ability to fly, for example, from Edinburgh to Heathrow to Shanghai if a direct flight is not available. The local market will simply not be big enough for a regional airport to deliver the direct route.*

As for the public service obligation process, we will introduce the strongest measures to ring-fence those slots. We will ensure that they cannot simply be taken away, and that should mean that they must be provided at a cost that is affordable for UK domestic aviation. If routes that are strategically necessary for the United Kingdom require PSO support financially, I have no doubt that this Government, and future Governments, will wish to ensure that those routes are provided for as well. We already apply that to some key routes.

This was followed by another [Statement](#) on Proposed Media Mergers and the First reading of a [Bill](#) on DiGeorge Syndrome.

Offences Against the Person Act 1861

The Chamber then hosted an Emergency [Debate](#) on abortion law, the Law being covered by Sections in an Act from 1861. The debate was understandably very heated on both sides and led to a few moments of controversy.

***Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD):** Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that people who, like me, would never have an abortion support the right for women to choose? It is not for us here to make that decision; it is for the individual to make that very personal decision.*

***Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP):** This debate has two sides to it. It has of course reflected the views of those who wish to control their own bodies, but what about the unborn child? That side has been lacking in most of the speeches today. What rights and protections does the state afford to unborn children? Listening to this debate, one would imagine that in Northern Ireland no consideration has been given to the views of the population. We had a debate in the Northern Ireland Assembly—more recently than in this House—where it was decided, across the parties, that the current legislation should stand, albeit with the review outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson). I am not embarrassed about the legislation in Northern Ireland, which, by the way, is balanced because it does protect the physical and mental health of the woman while at the same time recognising the rights of the unborn child.*

The House then moved on to the Second Reading of the Non-domestic Rating (Nursery Grounds) [Bill](#).

The day in the Chamber ended with an Adjournment [Debate](#) on Princess Alexandra Hospital, Harlow.

Treasury Committee

The Treasury Committee held an evidence [session](#) on the UK's Economic relationship with the EU.

Defence Committee

The Defence Committee's also held a private session in which Members considered the evidence gathered for the Committee's inquiry into the US and its relationship with NATO and the UK.

Wednesday

Prime Ministers Questions

The Secretary of State for Scotland preceded the Prime Minister this week answering [questions](#) in front of a packed Chamber, before the Prime Minister came to the Dispatch Box.

[Questions](#) to the Prime Minister this week turned back to Brexit once again. With the Withdrawal Bill returning to the House next week, the Government's promised White Paper was high on the agenda.

[Jeremy Corbyn \(Islington North\) \(Lab\)](#): The question was a very simple one actually: it was to ask when this White Paper will be published. Next week, we will be debating the most important piece of legislation we have seen for a very long time and we still have not seen the Government's negotiating position. Will the Prime Minister at least assure the House that not only will the White Paper be published ahead of the crucial June EU summit, but that there will be an opportunity to debate it in this House ahead of the summit?

[The Prime Minister \(Mrs Theresa May\)](#): The right hon. Gentleman talks about the votes that will take place in this House next week on the EU (Withdrawal) Bill, and indeed those votes will be important. They will be important to show our commitment to do what the British people have asked us to do, which is to leave the European Union. If he is talking about clarity ahead of those votes, perhaps he will take this opportunity to do what he refused to do when I asked him last time in Prime Minister's questions—[Interruption.]

[Mr Speaker](#): Order. Mr Yasin, calm yourself. You are normally a model of calm and repose. Relax, there is a long way to go.

[The Prime Minister \(Mrs Theresa May\)](#): Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would like to take the opportunity to do what he refused to do two or three weeks ago in this Chamber, which is to stand up and rule out a second referendum.



The House then moved on to the First Reading of a [Bill](#) on Youth (Services and Provisions).

Opposition Day

Retail Sector

The first debate focused on the Government's Industrial Strategy and the Retail Sector. There was real heat in the debate when the issue of innovation was raised.

[Vicky Ford \(Chelmsford\) \(Con\)](#): I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady, who has accused British retailers of lacking innovation. However, the UK is the third largest e-commerce market in the world. Digital taxation needs to be done on a cross-border basis, so will she join me in congratulating our Chancellor on getting 100 countries across the world to look at implementing a digital tax to allow us to address the level playing field between online and offline?

[Rebecca Long Bailey \(Salford and Eccles\) \(Lab\)](#): I have not in any way, shape or form suggested that any business

lacks the capacity or drive to innovate—quite the contrary—but they do lack Government support to drive that innovation. As for making tax digital, I ask the hon. Lady to read some of the Library research. While the sentiment is credible, the implementation has been far from it, with numerous businesses reporting problems from start to finish, and that needs to be addressed urgently.

The second Opposition Day [debate](#) was focused on Rural Crime and Public Services.

The day in the Chamber ended with an Adjournment [Debate](#) on Transport Safety: Blind and Visually Impaired People.

Exiting the European Union Committee

The Committee took [evidence](#) once again on the progress of the UK's negotiations with the EU, an important update ahead of the return of the Withdrawal Bill to the Commons next week.

Thursday

[Questions](#) to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Church Commissioners and the House of Commons Commission opened a busy Thursday morning.

This was followed by an [Urgent Question](#) on Heathrow.

Supreme Court Ruling: Abortion in Northern Ireland

Following a ruling on the issue by the Supreme Court suggesting the Law on abortion is in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, an [Urgent Question](#) was put to the Government.

[Joan Ryan \(Enfield North\) \(Lab\)](#): It cannot be right to criminalise women in Northern Ireland for actions that would not be criminal anywhere else in the UK. Does the Secretary of State agree with the ruling of Supreme Court Justice Mance, who has held that

“the present legislative position in Northern Ireland is untenable”

and that the current law

“clearly needs radical reconsideration”?

If she does, can she address the point that a number of us have made about how much longer she will allow women in Northern Ireland to suffer this untenable law?

[The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland \(Karen Bradley\)](#): There are many views that we all need to consider in the judgment. As I have said, we will spend a significant amount of time looking at the judgment and considering the points that have been made, but I do come back to the point that this matter needs to be dealt with by the politicians who have been elected by the people of Northern Ireland.

Business of the House

Business [questions](#) gave me the opportunity to highlight a recent report on Ex-Service Personnel and the difficulties they have experienced accessing support from the Government.



[Mrs Madeleine Moon \(Bridgend\) \(Lab\)](#): May we have a debate on the research carried out by the Forces in Mind Trust and the universities of York and Salford on the negative experience of service leavers in branches of Jobcentre Plus? There is a lack of understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder, and of the great skills that members of our services can bring to the civilian workforce.

[The Leader of the House of Commons \(Andrea Leadsom\)](#): The hon. Lady has raised an incredibly important point about stress and the appalling impact of experiences in the field of war. Defence questions will take place on Monday 11 June, and she may wish to take the matter

up directly with Ministers.

The House then heard two Select Committee Statements. The [First](#) was in regard to recent RBS Branch Closures, the [second](#) on Greening Finance.

A [Motion](#) on Privilege followed before Backbench Business.

Two Motions were heard by the Chamber, the [first](#) on Tuberculosis and the [second](#) on Turkey. Members were concerned about the reports of Human Rights Violations in the lead up to the upcoming elections in Turkey.

[Joan Ryan \(Enfield North\) \(Lab\)](#): I would just like to add one thing to the hon. Gentleman's important contribution. He will be aware that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has, in the key findings of his report, identified the use of torture and ill treatment in custody, including severe beatings, threats of sexual assault, actual sexual assault, electric shocks and water boarding by police, gendarmerie, military police and security forces. That is a very long way from recognising and adhering to human rights.

[John Howell \(Henley\) \(Con\)](#): I agree with what the right hon. Lady says about the UN's assessment. When Turkish citizens have brought cases to the European Court of Human Rights, it has invariably found against the Turkish Government. If I had the papers on me, I would be able to provide quotes from its judgments that align with her comments.

In conclusion, I urge the Government to take a strong line in making sure that Turkey fulfils its obligations to the Council of Europe and its promises to us as well.

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