



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT 18 - 22 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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The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill returned to the Commons for the final time this week. The Bill has now passed, but it was still only a first step on the long legislative road ahead, with at least three more Brexit Bills left to process.

Elsewhere, this was a mixed week for Defence issues. I attended the annual Land Warfare Conference in London, which was a great opportunity to hear thoughts, opinions and goals on strategy, and on how we can develop our Armed Forces to meet the threats of the future. The House also held an informative and instructive debate on NATO and the value the Alliance holds for Britain, for which the turnout and input from Members was encouraging.

However, speculation in the press about the Prime Minister's apparent unease in committing to extra Defence spending, as well as signals from the Chancellor that money promised for Defence may be on hold, are less than welcome developments.

Monday

The week began with questions to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

This was followed by two Urgent Questions, the first on Medicinal Cannabis and the second on Up-skirting.

NHS Long-Term Plan

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care then came to the House to make a statement on the long-term plan for the NHS.



Although an increase in spending on the NHS is welcome across the House, the debate came down to whether the increase is enough to improve the NHS or merely help it maintain its current position.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): *The Secretary of State closed by saying that he wants to transform health and social care, but every economic expert, from the Institute for Fiscal Studies to the Health Foundation, tells us that with a growing ageing population increasingly living with long-term conditions, this announcement will do nothing more than see the NHS stand still. Will he now admit that it is not enough to repair the damage of the past eight years of cuts to public health, GPs, and social care? How will he ensure that we have a service with new models of care fit for the 21st century?*

***The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** It is funny, isn't it: the hon. Lady says that this is not enough, but she did not say that when her own party was offering almost half the amount at the last election. She also says that every economic expert says that it is not enough. Let me tell her about one economic expert that does not say that—the Institute for Public Policy Research, left-leaning, in a piece of work done by Lord Ara Darzi, a former Labour Health Minister, who says that 3.5% is enough.*

Sewel Convention

An **Emergency Debate** on the Sewel Convention followed. The Sewel Convention is the standard practice followed by Government in regard to legislation which effects the devolved administrations. In effect it means that Westminster seeks the consent of the devolved administrations before passing legislation which effects them. The SNP called this debate as they feel that this convention has not been honoured in regard to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill.

***Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP):** If I may, I would like to make some progress. I will allow interventions again later.*

If the UK Government have a free hand to bend the rules, and to state when a situation is normal and when it is not, in order to undermine the Sewel convention, we can never, ever protect the powers of our Parliament. Westminster can do as it pleases, and we have to take it. Our Parliament in Scotland, which is supposed to be permanent, can see its powers being changed on a whim by Westminster, which defines these times as not normal. Can the Secretary of State for Scotland not see what is wrong with that? He is here to defend Scotland's interests, yet he is able to put his hands up and state that the times are not normal, at which point powers over fishing, agriculture, the environment and many other areas defined in the Scotland Act 1998 as being devolved are taken back by Westminster.



The UK Government have got this wrong. Last week, Scotland recognised that a power grab was taking place against our Parliament, at a time when Scottish Members of the UK Parliament were not even allowed to debate the matter here. The devolution settlement was being ripped up with no debate. Where is the democracy in Scotland's Parliament having its powers stripped and Scotland's MPs not being given the chance to speak?

***Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con):** The right hon. Gentleman says that Conservative Members opposed devolution in 1997, but will he take this opportunity to confirm that his own party also opposed it at the time, because its only aim was the separation of Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom? Also, he speaks about a power grab, but can he tell me how many powers the Scottish Parliament currently has, and how many it will have after this Government have enacted the legislation? He knows that it will be considerably more—[Interruption.]*

***Hon. Members:** No answer!*

***Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP):** No answer? To use a football term, that was miles offside. If the hon. Gentleman looks on Google, he will be able to see what my party did in the 1997 devolution campaign, when we worked collectively with everyone else. I can tell him that I was tramping the streets of Scotland, together with all my colleagues, to ensure that Scotland could get its Parliament—[Interruption.]*

***Mr Speaker:** Order.*

***Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP):** The Scottish people voted overwhelmingly for that Parliament, and one of the reasons for that was that we had suffered so badly during the years of the Thatcher and Major Governments, who destroyed communities up and down the land. It is little wonder that the Tories then paid the price and were wiped off the political landscape in Scotland. Today, we see the Scottish Conservatives behaving exactly as they did in the past, and I make this prediction: they will pay the price again, because they have stabbed the Scottish*

Parliament and the people of Scotland in the back by taking these powers back.

The House then moved on to an important [debate](#) on Acquired Brain Injury. The day in the Chamber ended with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on Accessibility Challenges: Invisible Disabilities.

Westminster Hall

Following an e-petition obtaining over 100,000 signatures, Westminster Hall played host to a [debate](#) on a referendum on abolishing the House of Lords. This is a contentious issue which elicits a broad range of opinions, and Members crucially examined how the Lords could be replaced with a body that would provide a similarly valuable service.

[Simon Hart \(Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire\) \(Con\)](#): I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but does he recall that when reform crashed and burned under the coalition Government, it did so because of the suggestion—almost insistence—of an elected element? That was all about the primacy of the House of Commons, so what was actually going on was reform of the Commons, because it was argued that at the moment that anyone in the House of Lords was elected, such Members had as much legitimacy as those of us in the Commons. The blockages and delays that we are experiencing now would therefore only become more profound, and would have some justification. That is why the reform proposal failed.

[Justin Madders \(Ellesmere Port and Neston\) \(Lab\)](#): I appreciate that, but it does not make the existing system any more acceptable. The problem that successive Governments have found with the House of Lords, and the trap that they and we all fall into, is that we obsess about how we shall make the system work, rather than saying as a statement of principle that we do not believe that an unelected Chamber in this country is an acceptable way to proceed. We should state as a starting point that we want abolition, then if we agree we should have a period of time in which to work out exactly what we want instead.

Tuesday

The day in the Chamber began with [questions](#) to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, followed quickly by a [Statement](#) following the fire at the Glasgow School of Art.

Cannabis-based Medicines

With the recent focus in the media and a couple of prominent individual cases, the Home Secretary came to the House to make a [Statement](#) on Cannabis-based Medicines.

The Government announced the licensing of Cannabis oil in specific circumstances. The debate then moved on to the maintenance of protections whilst ensuring access to new drugs.



[Yvette Cooper \(Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford\) \(Lab\)](#): All of us must want children—and also adults—to get the medical treatment that they need without additional hurdles that have nothing to do with medicine. I welcome the Home Secretary's announcement that he will look at the scheduling of cannabis, because it is incredibly hard to explain the scheduling classification of cannabis compared to opiates, and the additional burdens that that scheduling poses for the health service if such products are needed for treatment. May I ask him again to look more widely at the barriers and obstacles in his review? Will he look at whether these kinds of scheduling or licensing decisions should be passed to the Department of Health and Social Care, and whether much more drugs policy should, in fact, be led by that Department?

[The Secretary of State for the Home Department \(Sajid Javid\)](#): The right hon. Lady makes a number of good points. She is right to highlight that there are currently drugs that are under schedule 2, meaning that the medical benefits are accepted, but which can be a lot

more harmful than other drugs if they are used in the wrong way. She asked about the role of the Department of Health and Social Care in these kinds of decisions. This requires a cross-Government approach, with the Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Care working closely together, as we have seen. We have an issue in that these drugs are categorised as illegal under the Misuse of Drugs Act, but we need to recognise, where appropriate, that some of them have medicinal benefits, as has already been recognised with, for example, cocaine and morphine. It is therefore appropriate that the two Departments work together.

The House then held the First Reading of a [Bill](#) to introduce an MP for Gibraltar.

Opposition Day

Confidence in the Secretary of State for Transport

[Opposition day](#) was used to voice dissatisfaction in the Secretary of State for Transport. The Government won a vote on Confidence, but the level of unhappiness with the Minister's handling of the Department was clear.

[Bob Stewart \(Beckenham\) \(Con\)](#): *I know the Secretary of State and I know his Ministers. I bet a pound to a dollar that the Secretary of State and his Ministers pulled in the people responsible for the railway companies and got assurances from them that this would work well. I really feel it is quite unfair, because I am absolutely convinced that the Secretary of State, who I know well, would have checked this out. He has been let down very badly by the railway companies.*



[Andy McDonald \(Middlesbrough\) \(Lab\)](#): *The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point, but in support of my argument. He is demonstrating that that did not work. That was not a very good way of going about business, relying on people giving assurances rather than saying, "Show me. Where's your evidence?" You do that before you go ahead with it. You do not rely on people telling you nonsense.*

Ever since the timetable chaos arose, we have witnessed carefully crafted statements that try to ensure as little responsibility as possible can be attributed to the Department for Transport and the Secretary of State in charge of it. Let us consider the situation. This is a Government who refuse to recognise the accumulated evidence that their privatised structure of the railway is failing. Therefore, they refuse to accept a sensible and practical railway structure that can function properly.

Opposition day ended with another debate on the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) [Bill](#). The day in Chamber ending with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on Complex Regional Pain Syndrome.

Home Affairs Committee

The Committee held an evidence [session](#) on Policing for the Future. The Committee [questioned](#) Ministers on what police need to ensure our streets stay safe and on the challenges policing would face in the future.

[John Woodcock \(Barrow And Furness\) \(Ind\)](#): *Do you understand that communities like that are feeling that police forces, and indeed the Government, simply do not have a grip on this problem yet? Do you think that is an understandable reaction?*

[Rt Hon Nick Hurd MP, Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service](#): *I understand the thought but not having spoken to your constituents directly, I don't know how they feel about it. What I do know is that the Home Office and the police recognise that changes in the drugs market are taking place and the county lines movement is part of that. I am personally satisfied from what I have heard and read that the police understand the priority that needs to be attached to that and that we have collectively recognised the need for that work to be better coordinated and that we have stepped up as part of the serious violence strategy to put some taxpayers' money on the table to support that. That is not a one-off. We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of that policing effort and would expect Parliament to hold us and the police to account on that, and I am sure you will, John.*

Wednesday**Prime Ministers Questions**

Questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland preceded the Prime Minister at the Dispatch Box this week.

The Prime Minister faced a series of Questions on her announcement of an extra £20bn for the NHS.



Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Last night, the Prime Minister sent an email to Conservative party members telling them: “The money we now send to the EU will go to the NHS”.

The Government’s own Office for Budget Responsibility says we will not see any dividend until at least 2023. The Prime Minister talks about a strong economy, but our economic growth last year was the slowest of any major economy, and it has already been downgraded this year. If growth does not meet expectations, does that mean—this is the question—extra borrowing or higher mystery taxes?

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): It is the balanced approach that this Government take to our economy that has enabled us—[Interruption.] Oh, they all groan! They do not like to hear that there is a fundamental difference between us and the Labour party. We do believe in keeping taxes low, we do believe in putting money into our public services, and we also believe in dealing with our debt and making sure that we get debt falling. What would the Labour party do? The Labour party would not have money to put into the national health service, because the Labour party would bankrupt our economy. And yes, if we are talking about the amount of money that is being put into the NHS, let us just look at what the Labour party offered at the last election. The Labour party said that 2.2% more growth for the NHS would make it “the envy of the world”.

Well, I have to say to my right hon. and hon. Friends that I chose not to listen to that. We are not putting in 2.2% more growth; we are putting in 3.4% more growth.

The House then heard a Statement from the Government on the Gosport Independent Panel report and the First Reading of a Bill on an Armed Forces Representative Body.

European Union (Withdrawal) Bill

With the Lords having voted once again for an amendment guaranteeing a meaningful vote for Parliament after the Brexit negotiations are completed, the Bill returned to the Commons for Members to vote on the new amendment. The detail of the process of the negotiations was at the heart of the debate. The Government eventually won the vote by a margin of 16.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab):... It seems to me that the Government’s intention throughout has been to seek to neuter this House when we come to the end of the process. We are talking about the possibility of facing no deal at all. In his speech from our Front Bench, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) set the position out very clearly: first, not only would we be facing economic difficulty of the most serious kind—with impacts on trade, on our services industry and on broadcasting—but there would be impacts on the security of our nation, because with no deal in place, how would the exchange of information continue? These are not minor matters; they go to the heart of the Government’s responsibility to make sure that we are safe, that industry works, that taxes are raised and that public services are paid for. That is why people are getting exercised about this. It is not just some amendment to one Bill; it is the most important decision that the country has faced for generations.

As my right hon. and learned Friend pointed out, we are not ready to cope with the consequences. Members should contemplate this, for a moment: if, because the House cannot do anything about it, we fall off the edge of the cliff, and future generations look at us and say, "What did you do at that moment? What did you do? Didn't you say anything?", are we, as the House of Commons, really going to allow our hands to be bound and say, "Well, at least I took note of what was happening"? Our responsibility is not to take note; it is to take charge, to take responsibility and to do our job.

NATO

The House then moved on to a [General debate](#) on the NATO Alliance. The security the NATO Alliance offers us is sometimes overlooked, even in the House and so I took the opportunity to make the case not just for the military aspect, but the political element of the Alliance as well.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): It is wonderful to see how many right hon. and hon. Members have turned up for this debate, and I want to use the brief time available to me to consider the political threats. We have talked a lot about the military threats to the alliance, but we need to address a particular political threat, and I am not just talking about the rise of populist politicians and political parties that is straining the trust between NATO members and the accepted common values and aspirations across the alliance, which is a real threat. We must remember that we live in democracies, and democracies sometimes throw up leaders with whom we perhaps do not agree and whom we sometimes strongly oppose, but the point of a democracy is that, within the establishment of a Parliament, there is an opportunity for likeminded people to come together to discuss, debate and demonstrate a different way forward. That is what the NATO Parliamentary Assembly gives to us all.



The hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) talked about the European Union. In this place, we often mistakenly say that the European Union and NATO are separate entities, but they are becoming increasingly close. That closer alignment is being complicated by political decisions within the individual members of the alliance, by Brexit, by the refugee and migrant crisis and by different domestic political priorities and coalition tensions. We must not forget that.

More importantly, however, we must address the disaffection of our own population. Canada did a poll recently with Ipsos MORI and found that only 40% of the population understood what NATO was, that 71% of women had no understanding of the NATO mission and that 71% of millennials were unaware of what NATO is. I am a member of a NATO working group that wrote to member states to ask how, and in what subjects, the role of NATO in the defence and security of the Atlantic alliance is taught in schools. Only 18 countries replied, and the UK was not one of them. The UK could not spell out how we do it. We are writing again, and I hope the Minister will join me in making sure that the Department for Education responds and looks at the issue.

We found that there is definitely an east-west divide. In the western part of the alliance, there is a lower understanding of NATO, which is taught as if it is a history lesson only about the cold war. Estonia, in contrast, teaches global security and NATO in an elective course on national defence and has a new course on cyber-defence in its schools. Latvia includes security matters in social sciences, and it distributes information packages to schools and libraries explaining the myths about NATO. The Lithuanian Ministry of Defence has an education programme on national security and defence devoted to NATO. And in Poland, core curricula at primary and secondary schools teach issues related to security and defence.

The day in the Chamber ended with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on a UK Development Bank.

Thursday

[Questions](#) to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Attorney General began the day. This was followed by an [Urgent Question](#) on the Defence Fire and Rescue Project: Capita and then [Business Questions](#).

Universal Credit and Welfare Changes

The Government then made a [Statement](#) on Universal Credit, an issue many Members have great concern about given the poor record of rolling the scheme out across the Country.

[Debbie Abrahams \(Oldham East and Saddleworth\) \(Lab\)](#): *I cannot believe what I am hearing from the Government. They are in absolute denial, and not just about this report. In the past six months, there have been not one, not two, but three High Court decisions or tribunal rulings saying that the Government's actions with regard to PIP and, most recently, with regard to severely disabled people transitioning on to UC, are discriminatory and unlawful—they have been made to change. But yesterday, the Minister for Disabled People said in a Westminster Hall debate that there was nothing unlawful or discriminatory about the Government's actions. Does this not reflect what the UN called a "disconnect" between the "lived experience" of disabled people and this Government's policies? What is the Secretary of State doing to ensure that the implementation of all her policies recognises these judgments?*



[The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions \(Ms Esther McVey\)](#): *Again, I ask the hon. Lady to read the Court judgment. I had already made the decision on the disability premium. The Court did not ask the Government to alter the severe disability premium—we won on that point of law—so I ask the hon. Lady to digest the judgment properly. We have put in an extra £9 billion of health and disability funding to support people. In the last couple of years, we have got an extra 600,000 disabled people into work. That is what this is about—supporting the most vulnerable and helping more people into work. We have seen 3.2 million people move into work, including 600,000 disabled people. The hon. Lady should stop scaremongering. Should people have difficulties, I ask her to assist them so that they can get the best support for what they need. That is what Government Members are doing, and the figures reflect that.*

EU Settlement Scheme

The Government then made a further [Statement](#) on the EU Settlement Scheme for EU Citizens living in the UK.

Members were keen to ensure that the Statement from the Government was a sure step out of the uncertain that so many people have been left with.

[Hilary Benn \(Leeds Central\) \(Lab\)](#): *I thank officials from the Home Office and the Department for Exiting the European Union for briefing members of the Exiting the European Union Committee last week on how the arrangements were being developed. Will the Minister confirm that the Government's offer of settled status will apply to the 3 million-plus EU citizens in all circumstances? If, heaven forbid, no deal were reached, will those citizens who have already been granted settled status, under the roll-out timetable that the Minister has reported to the House today, keep it? Will the Government keep the scheme open to all the rest who have not yet applied, so they can remain in the United Kingdom even if there were no deal?*

[The Minister for Immigration \(Caroline Nokes\)](#): *The right hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. I commend the work of the many Select Committees who have sought over the past six months to summon me before them, including his own. We are not anticipating failure. That is an important part of this: we have confidence that there will be a deal. We have reached an agreement with the EU guaranteeing the rights of EU citizens living in the UK and of UK nationals living in the EU, and we do not expect that issue to be reopened. I take very seriously the commitment we have made to those EU citizens and I regard that as absolutely of prime importance.*

Backbench Business this week involved a [debate](#) on Refugee Family Reunion and a second [debate](#) on the Erasmus Plus Programme. The day in the Chamber ending with an Adjournment [debate](#) on Court Closures: Calderdale

EU Justice Sub-Committee

The Committee held an evidence [session](#) with the Home Secretary to further inquire into the rights over EU Citizens after Brexit. Shortly after this session the Government statement on the EU Settlement Scheme outlined developments to the rest of the House.