



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT 25 - 29 June 2018

Welcome to my *This Week in Parliament*, my weekly newsletter on events and developments in Parliament. **Your feedback is always welcome!**

House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA
Westminster: 020 7219 0814
Bridgend: 01656 750 002
madeleine.moon.mp@parliament.uk

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The spectre of Brexit continues to rumble on in the background of everything we do in Parliament. The warnings from Airbus and other businesses of the risks of a no deal scenario has brought the need for clarity from the Government sharply into focus, not just in Parliament, but around the Country.

Elsewhere, this week has been productive in terms of Defence issues. The Defence Select Committee publishing its findings and recommendations to increase the Defence budget will add extra weight to calls which are becoming deafening.

During the week I was able to attend several events focused on Defence, a conference on the progress of the Future Reserves 2020 plan was enlightening and further highlighted to me the need for the extra investment in Defence to ensure our Armed Forces have the resources they need.

Monday

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

Leaving the EU: Airbus Risk Assessment

Following the warnings from Airbus over its future in the UK if the Government could not strike a favourable deal with the EU, an [Urgent Question](#) was asked of the Government.

Comments made by various Cabinet Ministers seemingly dismissive of the concerns of business were high amongst Members concerns.



Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): *Is it not pretty damning that the Secretary of State has had to come to the Dispatch Box today to say that Airbus should be treated with respect when it tells the truth, rather than be criticised? Since the whole House knows that he understands what is at stake here, does he agree that the fact that the Cabinet is still arguing about what kind of customs arrangements it wants two years after the referendum is why a growing number of businesses despair at the Government's inability to get a grip of this issue?*

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): *I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. On the first point, we are an open economy. Businesses that employ people here are perfectly free to speak out and have a right to do so. It is incumbent on the Government*

to listen to what they say and factor that into the negotiations we are having. We have been very clear about that. When it comes to the negotiation of our future customs arrangements, the right hon. Gentleman knows, as Chair of the Select Committee on Exiting the European Union, which has given this extensive scrutiny, that up to now we have been discussing the terms of our withdrawal. We are coming on to talk about the future economic partnership. We are negotiating and setting out what we want to achieve through that, and this was always the time when that would be done. For evidence from Airbus and other companies to come forward at this time is to be expected, given the focus of the discussions over the weeks ahead.

The Government then answered a second [Urgent Question](#), this time on childhood obesity.

Energy Policy

A [Statement](#) followed in which the Government announced that it would not be saying yes to the proposals for the Swansea Tidal Lagoon.

[Carolyn Harris \(Swansea East\) \(Lab\)](#): Swansea Bay tidal lagoon is in my constituency. The Secretary of State will never understand the frustration and anger that felt in my city today. It prompts the question of just who is speaking for Wales in the Cabinet, because it is certainly not the Secretary of State for Wales. We have not had electrification; we have not had the tidal lagoon. If he does not do the job properly, it is time to move on, I fear.

[The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy \(Greg Clark\)](#): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has been vigorously engaged in making sure that every aspect of the analysis of this project has been conducted, including the impact on the local economy. The hon. Lady is familiar with the figures and the economics of the project, and because she is aware of the proposal she knows of its distance from being value for money, which causes higher bills for her constituents, including intensive energy users such as the steelworks in south Wales, which is something that any responsible Government have to take into account. I think she knows that this has been done in a rigorous way.

National Policy Statements: Airports

The main business of the day came with the [debate](#) over the third runway at Heathrow. Despite many legitimate concerns, particularly over air pollution, there was a large majority in the House for a third runway and the benefits it could bring to the Country. The vote was agreed to by a large majority of 415 against 119.

[Graham Stringer \(Blackley and Broughton\) \(Lab\)](#): I will join the Secretary of State in the Lobby tonight because I think that the third runway is a piece of infrastructure of national importance that will benefit the whole nation. However, what it must not do is increase the disparity of wealth and income between the regions of this country and London and the south-east. Can the Secretary of State tell us what extra funds he will invest in the regional airports to ensure that they can make their contribution? It cannot be right, at a time when this investment will lead to a great deal of public expenditure in the south-east, that Manchester airport is expected to pay for the station for HS2.

[Chris Grayling](#): I absolutely take on board the hon. Gentleman's point. Of course Manchester airport is a great success story, and a great international success story. I have been working with the airport management to help it expand its expertise internationally and will continue to do that.

What I would say to reassure the hon. Gentleman is that, as he will be aware, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority has indicated that the region of the country that will secure the highest proportion of Government spending on transport in the next few years is the north-west. That is right and proper—a sign of our continuing commitment to deliver improvements in the north of this country that are long, long overdue.



The day in the Chamber ended with an [Adjournment debate](#) on Veterans and Soldiers: Statue and Limitations.

Tuesday

Questions to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Following the notable absence of the Secretary of State from the vote on Heathrow's third runway on Monday, this [question](#) session gave Members a timely opportunity to scrutinise the Minister.



***Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab):** May I first sympathise with the Foreign Secretary that, due to his emergency duties abroad, he was unable to join last night's fight against Heathrow expansion? Four years ago, the Foreign Secretary was asked what was the biggest lesson he had learned—[Interruption.] Four years ago, he was asked what was the biggest lesson he had learned from his supposed hero Winston Churchill. His answer was:*

"Never give in, never give in, never give in".

For some reason, Churchill did not add, "Unless you can catch a plane to Kabul." The Foreign Secretary clearly has a new hero, and we know who he is—the clue is in the hair. He said on 6 June that he is "increasingly admiring" of Donald Trump. He has begun to tell us some of the reasons why, but could he help those of us who are yet to be convinced by telling us three things about the current President that he increasingly

admires?

***The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson):** I hesitate to say it, but I have anticipated the right hon. Lady's question. I have pointed out, No.1, that it was admirable that Donald Trump's Administration responded after the chemical weapons attacks by the Assad regime supported by the Russians. It is a good thing that the United States is trying, and trying very hard, to solve the problem of a nuclear-armed North Korea. I admire at least the President's efforts in that respect. It is also a good thing that the President is encouraging our European friends and partners to spend more on their own defence. We will certainly assist in that effort.*

The House then moved on to the First Reading of a [Bill](#) on Food Advertising (Protection of Children from Targeting).

Members then debated and voted on two Trade Agreements. The [first](#) debate was on an agreement reached between Canada and the European Union and the [second](#) with Japan. Although there were a few dissenting voices and a choice of abstention by the Opposition, both agreements were passed with relative ease.

Lords amendments to the Automated and Electrical Vehicles Bill were then [debated](#) and voted on.

Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Bill

Despite its mundane sounding name, this [Bill](#) is an important piece of Brexit Legislation aiming to replace the EU Licensing structure we currently follow. This is an important aspect that needs to be considered when designing a new border system.

***Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** On the ports issue and on the visits, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is very strange that the Secretary of State for Transport said that, post Brexit, there will be no further checks and it will be just like the US-Canada border? In fact there are checks at that border and also we learned from a written question from me to the Secretary of State that he has not even visited the US-Canada border, so goodness knows how he thought he knew how it operates. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that is symbolic of the shambles?*

To get in touch, write to me at: 47 Nolton Street Bridgend, CF31 3AA Call: 01656 750002

Email: moonm@parliament.uk

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/madeleine.moon>; or visit www.madeleinemoonmp.com

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): *I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. As it is on the subject of borders, which is what we are debating, it is an entirely appropriate intervention. It gives me the opportunity to point out that the same Secretary of State often refers to the advantages of the border between Norway and Sweden. Again I am not sure whether he has visited that border. Maybe he has. If he has, he will have found on his visit that some of the border points are inconveniently shut at certain times of the day and night. He will also have discovered that one of the factors that Swedish business often quotes as being a major constraint on doing trade with Norway is the fact that the border is not in fact frictionless. So there is a bit of a problem in terms of the Secretary of State, but I am sure he has now been on many fact-finding missions and has increased his knowledge of the subject on which he speaks.*

The day in the Chamber ended with an [Adjournment debate](#) on Council Tax and Second Homes.

Defence Committee

Away from the Chamber, The Defence Committee held an evidence [session](#) on Armed Forces and Veterans Mental Health. The Minister, Tobias Elwood, was present to give [evidence](#) to the Committee. I took the opportunity to question the Minister on the provision of support in Wales.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): *Minister, I want to bring you in here because of the concerns that we felt at the variation between the devolved Administrations about access to services. Are you aware of the variations? Are you monitoring this? What will the Ministry of Defence do, for example, with a constituent of mine, where there is no in-service mental health support provision, because the Welsh Assembly Government do not purchase from Combat Stress and they rely on Combat Stress having a little spare cash available at some point and offering a place for free? How are we making sure that, because someone lives in a devolved Administration, they are getting the same services, and how are you monitoring that?*

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Tobias Elwood): *You raise such an important issue, which is why the veterans' board was created. I am the Veterans Minister, and there is an immediate assumption that somehow I have a magic wand and can provide answers to this, whereas this audience will know exactly where the remit of the MOD begins and ends.*

Where we are trying to leverage greater clout is through the responsibility to raise the profile, understanding and recognition of what other departments should do, including the devolved Ministries. The veterans' board has only just been established to underline—to confirm—that, whether in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, or indeed whether it is Work and Pensions or Health, each Department is meeting its responsibilities to armed forces personnel that are serving and the veterans community as well.

I am very happy to look at the individual situation to deal with your constituent. I do not know if anybody wants to talk about the relationship specifically to do with Wales.

Wednesday

The Minister for the Cabinet Office preceded the Prime Minister at the Dispatch Box to start the day. When the Prime Minister did approach the Box to answer Members [Questions](#), she faced scrutiny over the public disagreements of her Cabinet Colleagues over the warnings from Businesses about a no deal Brexit.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): *Well, the Foreign Secretary did not back it either, but in his own way, he was helping the aviation industry: by spending 14 hours in a plane for a 10-minute meeting in Afghanistan.*

The Government are not threatening the EU with their ridiculous position; they are threatening skilled jobs in this country. But at least one Government Minister understands this: the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb). He has asked this question, which I think is about the Health and Foreign Secretaries:

“Do the leadership aspirations of multi-millionaires trump the need to listen to the employers and employees of this country?”



Well, apparently they do. The head of BMW, which directly employs more than 8,000 workers—that is 8,000 jobs—in this country, has said that he needs to know the Government’s plans for customs. He says:

“If we don’t get clarity in the next couple of months we have to start making those contingency plans”—
[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: *Order. The Prime Minister was heard. No concerted attempt from either side of this House to shout a Member down will ever succeed. However long it takes, the Prime Minister will be heard and the Leader of the Opposition will be heard. Get the message.*

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): *The noise of people hiding behind the Gallery is interesting, Mr Speaker. I am asking the Prime Minister how many more firms are telling her in private what Airbus and BMW are now saying very publicly.*

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): *We have been meeting with business and we are listening to business. That is why we are very clear on our customs arrangement that we want to ensure not just that we deliver on our commitment in Northern Ireland, with trade as frictionless as possible, but that we can trade around the rest of the world. If we are talking about Government plans for business, it is this Government who have brought the deficit down and it is this Government who are seeing employment at record levels. What would Labour’s three-point plan for business be? A 7% rise in corporation tax, nationalisation without compensation and a run on the pound. That is not backing business; it is a plan to break Britain.*

The Government then answered an [Urgent Question](#) on Privately Financed Prisons, before the Chamber held the First Reading of the Northern Ireland [Budget](#) and a [Bill](#) on Toilets (Provision and Accessibility).

Offensive Weapons Bill

The Second Reading of this [Bill](#) was the main business of the day. The intention of the Bill is to introduce measures to deal with a rise in knife crime and acid attacks. Although there was some controversy over the proposals on fire-arm licenses control, the Bill had broad support and was passed.



Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): *As my right hon. Friend will know, there is some concern among Conservative Members about the proposal in the Bill to ban .5 calibre weapons, because it would criminalise otherwise law-abiding users of a weapon which, as far as I know, has never been used in a murder. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to enter into full discussions with his Ministers before the Committee stage?*

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): *I will say a bit more about that in a moment, but my hon. Friend has raised an important issue, and I am glad that he has focused on it. The Bill does make some changes in relation to high-energy rifles and other such weapons. We based those measures on evidence that we received from intelligence sources, police and other security experts. That said, I know that my hon. Friend and other colleagues have expertise, and evidence that they too wish to provide. I can give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance that I am ready to listen to him and others, and to set their evidence against the evidence that we have received.*

The day in the Chamber ended with an [Adjournment debate](#) on Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust: Governance.

Thursday

Oral Answers to Questions

The Secretary of State for International Trade was at the Dispatch Box to answer Members [Questions](#) to begin the day. The topics ranging from investment overseas to Parliamentary scrutiny over trade deals.

Trade Questions were followed by Questions to the Secretary of State for Women and Equalities. I took the oppor-

tunity to highlight the importance to and of our Armed Forces for STEM projects and education.

***Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** Oldcastle Primary School in my constituency holds a STEM week in which it involves all our local businesses in a whole range of activities with its pupils. Last week Oldcastle and Trelales Primary Schools—the right hon. Lady is the most appropriate Minister to appreciate this—attended the RAF presentation team and saw the whole range of STEM activities that are available in the armed forces. Does she agree that we also have an opportunity to highlight STEM by engaging our armed forces' presentation teams?*

***The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt):** I absolutely do, and I thank the hon. Lady for mentioning this during Armed Forces Week. There are fantastic career opportunities in not only the RAF, but other services. Those armed forces are more operationally capable when we have equal numbers of men and women serving.*



Nuclear Sector Deal

The Government then came to the House to answer an [Urgent Question](#) on the Nuclear Sector Deal. During the debate that followed, I raised the issue of cyber-security for Nuclear sites with the Minister.

***Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** The electronic infrastructure summit held this week in London urged the need for independent cyber-security audits across critical national infrastructure, particularly in the energy sector. Does the Minister agree that nuclear is one sector where we urgently need to ensure that cyber-security keeps us free from attacks and black sky events?*

***The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Mr Sam Gyimah):** The hon. Lady identifies a risk to this critical infrastructure. I can assure her that we take all the steps necessary to make sure that it is protected, and cyber-security is one of those.*

The House then moved on to [Business Questions](#).

Leaving the EU: Parliamentary Scrutiny

Two Select Committee Statements followed. The [first](#) on Adult Social Care and the [Second](#) on leaving the EU.

The Select Committee on Exiting the European Union, following the conclusion of one of their reports, expressed deep concern at the timetable of events not allowing Parliament a proper opportunity to scrutinise and debate the outcome of the negotiations.

***Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab):** I congratulate my right hon. Friend and thank him for his forbearance in what is sometimes a very robust discussion in Committee; he is certainly masterful in seeking consensus.*

The question is really around the vote in October and the content of the political declaration on the framework for the future relationship. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a real risk of a wishy-washy, vague, motherhood-and-apple-pie political declaration in an attempt to keep the Conservative party together, rather than giving MPs a clear sense of the direction our future relationship would take? What steps does he think the Government should take to assure the House that there will be sufficient detail in that political declaration to make a meaningful vote truly meaningful?

***Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab):** I thank my hon. Friend for his work on the Committee. I hope he will forgive me if I do not comment on party considerations in making this statement here today, but he raises an important issue about the nature of the political declaration. We heard clearly in evidence that it will not be a treaty or draft treaty, although there was some debate when we heard from Guy Verhofstadt about whether including it as an annexe to the agreement would give it greater force. It will come down to this question: will the House think there is sufficient certainty about the nature of our future relationship on all the things I mentioned a moment ago to the Chair of the*

Select Committee on Health, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), in the political declaration or not? If we approve it and there is not that certainty, the House will really be saying, “Well, let’s see what happens.”

There are two parts to this negotiation: the withdrawal agreement, which is the divorce settlement, and which is important, and our future relationship on trade, security, the fight against terrorism, foreign policy and services—80% of the British economy is services—which is the really important bit. Therefore, the more detail and the more certainty the political declaration can offer, and the more the parties to the negotiation can show they are committed to turning that into a treaty, the better it will be for Parliament as it makes its judgment.

Backbench Business focused on Improving [Air Quality](#) and then moved on to the question of [Business Appointments](#).

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

Russian Federation Activity

Away from the Chamber, Westminster Hall hosted a [debate](#) on Russian activity and the way in which it affects the UK and our allies.

[Stephen Kinnock \(Aberavon\) \(Lab\)](#): I am sure the hon. Gentleman will come on to this point. Does he agree that the Electoral Commission, in responding to measures aimed at subverting democratic processes in this country, is entirely unfit for purpose, that it is an analogue regulator in a digital age, and that, in fact, we should be integrating its functions into the National Crime Agency and giving it real forensic investigatory ability, to ensure that attempts to subvert our democracy are dealt with effectively and properly?

[Mr Bob Seely \(Isle of Wight\) \(Con\)](#): I think the hon. Gentleman is more of an expert than I am on that. I absolutely think that the strength of our electoral systems and their vulnerability is one of the critical issues. I think it is number 8 on my list, so I will come to it shortly. I am grateful for his suggestion, which goes further than what I would propose.

To wind up the first point, occasional Government statements are good, as are some excellent Select Committee reports, but I believe we need something more permanent — not something that points fingers at the Russians but something that seeks to methodically understand the way subversive operations operate in the western world. We face a new kind of political conflict from hackers, trolls, assassins, politically connected business executives and market manipulators, spin doctors, paid-for protestors and criminals, who are often more usable and useful than conventional tools of conflict. On that point about market manipulators, given the Bloomberg investigation earlier this week, which showed that hedge funds had been buying private polling data that effectively allowed them to front-run the Brexit vote, is it not time to initiate a parliamentary inquiry into the behaviour of those involved, especially considering statements made by some party political leaders at the time of the result, which appeared to concede defeat, despite possibly being told by their favoured pollsters that the Leave campaign would likely win? I choose my words carefully, but I think there is a prima facie case here, which is concerning.



