



## THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT 02 - 06 July 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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As the Summer recess fast approaches it is beginning to feel like crunch time with many of the issues we are addressing in Parliament.

The European Council meeting last week has set the tone for the next round of Brexit talks, the Prime Minister needs to offer clarity after the meeting of the Cabinet at Chequers this weekend. If not the warnings from business may become deafening. Similarly, the NATO summit next week gives added pressure to the Government's Modernising Defence Plan. If the Defence Secretary fails to produce the increases and changes needed, the summit will not be a pleasant one for the UK.

Elsewhere, it was a pleasure to Chair the AGM of the APPG on MND this week. I spent two days of this week in Berlin at a Security and Intelligence Conference looking at issues around terrorism and serious and organised crime.

### Monday

The week began with Questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions answering Members [Questions](#).

This was followed by two Urgent Questions. The [first](#) was on Detainee Mistreatment and Rendition and the [second](#) was regarding the ongoing fires on Saddleworth Moor and Tameside.

### June European Council

The Prime Minister then made a [Statement](#) to the House on the European Council meeting of last week.



Members questioned the Prime Minister on whether she had heeded the warnings from businesses over the risks of a no-deal Brexit.

*[Stephen Kinnock \(Aberavon\) \(Lab\)](#): According to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, investment in new models, equipment and facilities in the UK was just £347 million in the first half of the year compared with £647 million in the same period of 2017, and that is on top of foreign direct investment plummeting by 90% since 2016. This is not "Project Fear"; it is happening right here, right now, to our jobs and to our economy. Does the Prime Minister not recognise that if she were to commit to the European economic area, she would stop the rot?*

***The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** If the hon. Gentleman looks at foreign direct investment in the United Kingdom, he will see that we remain the No. 1 destination for FDI in Europe.*

The Government then made a [Statement](#) on the Infected Blood Inquiry.

### Estimates Day

The 3<sup>rd</sup> allotted day for debates on the budgets of Government Departments included questions on several departments. [First](#) of all the Ministry of Justice came under scrutiny, this was [followed](#) by the Department of Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Housing. High on the list of priorities for Members was ensuring the increased funding for the NHS would be used efficiently.

***Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab):** Returning to the hon. Lady's point about public health not being part of the recent announcement, has she seen the 2017 review that highlighted that there is a return of over £14 for every pound spent on local and national public health policies? It therefore makes economic sense to invest in public health, not to cut it in any future announcement.*

***Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con):** I absolutely agree. This is about not just funding for public health, but the policy levers. We do not need lots of talk about the "nanny state" that denigrates important national public policy drivers, because although we need funding for local services, as the hon. Lady says, this is also about the policy environment that is necessary to make important changes. Investing in public health makes a huge difference for people.*

*One of the problems here is that when the public are asked where they would like the priorities to fall, we often hear, understandably, about the importance of cancer outcomes, mental health and emergency waiting times. Public health is often bottom of the list because nobody necessarily knows when their life has been saved by a public health policy. The reality is that the major changes and achievements relating to life expectancy have arisen largely thanks to public health policy, but we rarely turn on the television and see a programme called "24 Hours in Public Health", which is a shame.*

The day in the Chamber ended with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on Persistent Rough Sleeping in Nottingham.

### Public Accounts Committee

The Committee took [evidence](#) from the MoD on the costing of the [Nuclear programmes](#) of the Ministry. Understandable of particular concern were the costs of the programme.

***Meg Hillier (Chair) (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab):** I wanted to ask Mr Lovegrove what the impact has been of the cost challenges on the rest of the Department so far. Obviously already some contingencies have been drawn down from Treasury, but you have got quite a commitment to keeping costs down in this area, so what has the impact been so far, and what are the risks in the future, if Mr Booth and Mr Kelly do not manage to deliver what they have set out to do?*

***Stephen Lovegrove, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence:** Yes, you are obviously right; it is a very large component of our equipment programme. Most of it is in the equipment programme, so it is a good £44 billion of the £178 billion. The next largest component is in the information segment, broadly defined, which is about £23 billion, so it is very big—*

***Meg Hillier (Chair) (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab):** So it is about a quarter of your—*

***Stephen Lovegrove, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence:** It is about a quarter of our entire equipment programme. It is not, in a sense, ring-fenced in financial terms, although some of the things that we have done by setting up the SDA and setting up the nuclear delivery body, which, now, Julian runs, effectively give a degree of coherence and unity around that financial management, which it did not have before; so I feel much more comfortable that it is being collected in one place and we can manage it.*

## Tuesday

### Questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer

The day began with the Chancellor at the Dispatch Box facing Members [questions](#). The questioning ranged from first time house buyers to the effect of leaving the EU on agriculture. However, pertinent given the recent warnings from Businesses, a large amount of focus was given to the car industry.

*[Matt Western \(Warwick and Leamington\) \(Lab\)](#): The Chancellor will be well aware of the importance of car sales and manufacturer investment as indicators of economic output and business confidence respectively. In the year to May, car sales were down 7% and truck sales were down 6%. Investment by vehicle manufacturers fell by 55% in 2017 versus 2015, and by 47% in 2018 versus 2017 for the first quarter of the year, so it is on track to be down 75% from three years ago. Does the Chancellor accept that these figures are the reality behind the Foreign Secretary's assertion—I think this was the phrase—"fudge business"?*

*[The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury \(Robert Jenrick\)](#): As I have just described, the automotive sector is extremely important, and few of its businesses are more important than Jaguar Land Rover, which I appreciate is close to the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Car sales in 2017 were actually 25% higher than in 2010 and the UK remains the second biggest car market in Europe after Germany, so there is a great deal to celebrate in the UK automotive sector, and we will continue to support it.*

An [Urgent Question](#) on Govia Thameslink/Rail Electrification was then put to the Government. Followed by a further [Urgent Question](#) on the Government's LGBT Action Plan.

### Counter-Daesh Update

The Secretary of State for Defence came to the House to give Members the Government's quarterly [update](#) on the campaign against Daesh. Although Daesh's territorial control in the Middle East has been reduced and almost destroyed, they have a growing presence in North Africa, a concern I raised with the Minister.



*[Mrs Madeleine Moon \(Bridgend\) \(Lab\)](#): What steps is the Secretary of State's Department taking to counter those in Daesh, al-Qaeda and their affiliates who are now creating chaos across the swathe of sub-Saharan Africa, forcing much of the people movement towards the Mediterranean and on to our shores? What are we going to do there to again destroy Daesh?*

*[The Secretary of State for Defence \(Gavin Williamson\)](#): I am sure that the hon. Lady is very aware of the work that we have already announced, working with our partners, the French, as well as many other NATO countries, on dealing with the increasing problem of Daesh in the sub-Saharan region and with how it could migrate into Europe. We will continue to work very closely with the French and other NATO partners. The Government continue to look at how we can work more closely with other countries, such as Nigeria and Libya, to ensure that we do not see this migration of terror and the spread of Daesh into ungoverned areas.*

The House then held the First Reading of a [Bill](#) on Pet Theft. Another Estimates day focused on the Department of [Education](#) and the [Treasury](#).

### Foreign Affairs Committee

The Committee took [evidence](#) from the Minister for the Middle East in this [session](#). Taking a broad view of his work across the region. The conflict in Yemen featuring prominently on the agenda.

**Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP):** *It is good to see you, Minister. I wanted to start on Yemen. Will you set out in general terms what the UK is doing to seek conclusion of the conflict in Yemen, and perhaps set out why it is in our broader national interest to do so?*

**Alistair Burt MP, Minister of State for the Middle East, Foreign and Commonwealth Office:** *Okay. The conflict in Yemen has now been going on for about three years, with significant humanitarian consequences, as we all know. The politics are that a Houthi-led insurgency sought to topple the legitimate Government of Yemen and, after an appeal for support, coalition parties led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE acted in defence of a legitimate Government and are seeking to remove the insurgents.*

*To cut a long story short, we have now reached a situation in which the United Kingdom can see no military solution to the issue—it has to be settled politically. Accordingly, we are taking the view that the pause in the conflict around the city and port of Hodeidah has provided an opportunity for UN envoy Martin Griffiths to get to work to seek to conclude some negotiation between the Houthi and the coalition. That work is ongoing.*

*We believe that it is in the UK's interest to give maximum support to the work of the UN envoy in order to see this conflict concluded by negotiation. We hope that whatever is happening on the ground militarily will translate into a political solution.*

## Wednesday

### Prime Ministers Questions

The Secretary of State for International Development [preceded](#) the Prime Minister this week. When the Prime Minister stepped up to the Dispatch Box she was [challenged](#) on the state of the UK's transport network.

**[Jeremy Corbyn \(Islington North\) \(Lab\):](#)** *When Sadiq Khan ran for Mayor of London, he promised to freeze bus fares, and what has he done? He has frozen bus fares. [Interruption.] If the Prime Minister is concerned about the travelcard fares, she should speak to the Secretary of State for Transport: he is the one who sets that fare. Bus routes are being wiped out: 26 million fewer journeys have been made across the north of England and the midlands under her Government. So much for a northern powerhouse and a midlands engine. Can we be clear: does the Prime Minister think that deregulation of the bus industry, putting profit before passengers, has been a success or a failure?*



**[The Prime Minister \(Mrs Theresa May\):](#)** *The right hon. Gentleman talks about what the Mayor of London has done, but what have we seen in the number of people using buses in London? It has gone down under the current Mayor. If he wants to talk about what Mayors are doing, I am very happy to talk about what Andy Street, the Conservative Mayor of the West Midlands, has done; he has extended free bus fares to apprentices and students.*

### Demolition of Khan al-Ahmar

The Government then responded to an [Urgent Question](#) on the proposed demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar in the West Bank. A lengthy legal battle has seen a decision for the village to be demolished and its inhabitants moved by the Israeli Government. As the village is in the West Bank, much international concern has been raised about the legality of this action.

**[Hilary Benn \(Leeds Central\) \(Lab\):](#)** *It is, sadly, all too clear that, as well as destroying people's homes, as we have heard today, the Government of Israel are in the process of severely damaging their international reputation when it comes to respect for the rule of law. Given all the criticism that the right hon. Gentleman has made from the Dispatch Box and other countries have echoed, why does he think the Government of Israel feel they can get away with doing what they want?*

**[The Minister for the Middle East \(Alistair Burt\):](#)** *I do not know whether it is appropriate to answer in the terms that*

*the right hon. Gentleman has offered. He poses his own question, which I think will be out there for many others to consider. We remain clearly very attached to Israel as an ally in many respects in terms of defence and security particularly in what is a difficult region, but, as is sometimes the case even with the closest friends, there are areas where we are not only not certain of their course of action but believe it to be fundamentally wrong, and this is one of those. So we must manage that relationship. This provides another opportunity for us to talk further about what will happen in the future but, every time there is something like this, it makes it that bit more difficult to see that something we have all been working on for so long is going to result in the solution we are all seeking. But we will continue to press for that.*

This was followed by a [Statement](#) on Sustainable Fisheries. Two Bills were then brought before the House. The [first](#) focused on International Development (Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups) and the [second](#) the Ivory Bill.

### Opposition Day

This [Opposition Day](#) was allotted to the SNP who chose to focus on a Claim Of Right For Scotland. Proposing that the House recognises the right of Scotland to form its own Government to suit their needs, the claim based on a convention established in the House.

The day in the Chamber ended with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on NHS Complaints System: Wales.

### Thursday

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

### Universal Credit

The Government then came to the Dispatch Box to answer an [Urgent Question](#) on Universal Credit. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions issued an apology for misleading the House over Universal Credit and the information produced by the National Audit Office.

*[Frank Field \(Birkenhead\) \(Lab\)](#): We are grateful for the Secretary of State's apology—again—for one aspect of her behaviour where the Comptroller and Auditor General criticised her for dissembling. There were two others. First, she told the House that the Comptroller and Auditor General had advised her to roll out faster, whereas he told her to pause so that vulnerable claimants would not be hit further. Secondly, that universal credit is working is not proven, as she said, with 40% of claimants finding themselves in financial difficulty, 25% unable to make a claim online, and 20% overall, but two thirds of disabled claimants, not being paid on time and in full, hence the demand of the Comptroller and Auditor General, a big regulator in this country, for her to pause the universal credit programme.*

*[The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions \(Ms Esther McVey\)](#): We need to separate two parts of this. One bit is where I came myself to the House to apologise for using the wrong words. I used the words “faster rate” and “speeded up” on the premise that the report had said there was no practical alternative but to continue with universal credit and that there had been a regrettable slowing down. My interpretation of that was incorrect, which is why I came to the House yesterday and apologised for my words. We should separate that from the impact of the changes. I said—and I stand by this—that the impact of the changes could not have been felt because it was still being rolled out and those impacts were still being felt and therefore could not have been taken into account. We need to separate where I used the incorrect words, for which I came to the House to apologise, from the impacts of the changes and therefore the conclusions that can be drawn.*



[Business of the House](#) then followed, with the Leader laying out the programme for the next week. The Government next made a [Statement](#) on the Construction Sector Deal.

### Amesbury Incident

With what appear to be two further victims of Novichok in Amesbury near Salisbury over the weekend, the Government came to the House to make a [Statement](#) on the incident.

Investigations are still ongoing nothing has yet been ruled out, the Home Secretary did, however, confirm that the substance was the same as was used in the attack on the Skripals earlier this year. Members were concerned about how long the substance could take to degrade to the point of harmlessness.



***[Yvette Cooper \(Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford\) \(Lab\)](#)***: I welcome the Home Secretary's statement. Our police, intelligence officers and medical staff are among the best in the world, and I know that they will be doing everything possible to keep people safe and to pursue this vile crime against this couple and the original Skripal attack. Can he confirm that he has had no co-operation from the Russian Government, which would be both revealing and shocking in itself? Will he also say a little bit more about Novichok and whether or how it degrades or deteriorates and how easy it is to detect, as he will be aware that there is already conflicting information and, potentially, misinformation being circulated on this?

***[The Secretary of State for the Home Department \(Sajid Javid\)](#)***: I thank the right hon. Lady for her question. First, I can confirm that we have had no co-operation from the Russian Government, but given their responsibility for the original attack and their campaign of disinformation, no one in the House should be surprised about that. I have made it clear today that, if the Russians wanted to respond in a positive way and provide more information—for example, on Novichok and on how they disposed of the nerve agent, if they did—they could, but they have clearly chosen not to. I have no doubt that, in the coming days and weeks, we will see an increased campaign of disinformation from the Russian state.

*The right hon. Lady specifically asks about Novichok and that type of nerve agent. Like all nerve agents, it will deteriorate over some time, but my understanding is that, in the case of this type of nerve agent, that some time could be months and months. Therefore, it is scientifically perfectly possible that this nerve agent came from the same batch; it could well be the exact same nerve agent that was used in March because it would not have had enough time to deteriorate in any meaningful way.*

*The right hon. Lady also asks about detecting a nerve agent. It is not easy to detect at all. Detection equipment is available for radioactive substances, but detecting a nerve agent is a very different matter and there is no easy way at all to detect it. There are some ways to help find it, but it is hard to detect. That said, the considerable experience that we built up back in March will help us in responding to this incident, too.*

Backbench Business this week saw a [Motion](#) on the Transforming Care Programme agreed to. The day in the Chamber ending with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on Paupers Funerals. This debate had the funding of funerals at the top of its agenda.

***[Mr John Hayes \(South Holland and The Deepings\) \(Con\)](#)***: I am sure the Minister is just about to announce it, and I do not want to steal his thunder because he is a fine new member of the Government, but I called for the cap to be lifted. He may want to make that announcement now and make a big impact, or he might want to reflect and write to me about it very soon.

***[The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice \(Edward Argar\)](#)***: My right hon. Friend is typically beguiling in attempting to persuade me to announce changes to policy from the Dispatch Box. However, the funding offered from the funeral expenses payments scheme and the social fund budgeting loan—he has referred to other measures taken by the Government, such as changing the rules so that additional contributions may be received without deductions being necessary from that fund—provides a level of support while, crucially, maintaining a fiscally viable fund.