Syria Daesh Vote

The vote on whether to extend air strikes against Daesh in Syria saw a very emotive and impassioned debate. There was high demand to take part in the debate so unfortunately I was unable to speak. I made my stance on the matter clear before the debate started, that I was opposed to extending the air strikes to Syria because the Prime Minister had not outlined a comprehensive political strategy to create peace and stability in Syria. This was the position I had outlined in my October article published in the Huffington Post, Winning The Game Of Shadows.

I was appalled by Cameron calling those who voted against air strikes as ‘terrorist sympathisers’ and his refusal to apologise for such a provocative, insulting and blatantly incorrect statement.

I would also like to take this opportunity to deplore the calls to de-select Labour MPs who voted with the government. Specifically, I wish to condemn the ‘Left Unity’ group for publishing the list of the 66 Labour MPs who voted for the motion and branding them as ‘warmongers’, and I also have serious concerns about the activities of an organisation called ‘Momentum’, which could potentially become a party within a party.

I know that every Labour MP examined his / her conscience and reflected deeply about his / her decision, and it is neither correct nor acceptable to brand those who voted for the motion as ‘warmongers’, as this implies that they were somehow unthinkingly and ideologically in favour of the air strikes, which was patently not the case. Every Labour MP weighed the arguments around this complex and emotive issue, and came to a final view after detailed consideration.

It was right that Jeremy gave us a free vote on this issue, and right that we had a robust (but civilised) debate about it. The Labour Party is a broad church, and we will destroy ourselves if we start calling for people to be de-selected every time there’s a difference of opinion.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03b3c3g

Spending Review

The Chancellor somehow managed to find £27 billion down the back of the sofa, so the short-term impact of the Autumn Statement was less damaging than it could potentially have been.

However, let’s be clear: this is not the end of austerity. Very painful and needless cuts will still go ahead. Tax credit cuts have been cancelled due to the humiliating defeat of the government in the Lords, but tax credits themselves will be phased out by 2018, and comparable cuts to their replacement, Universal Credit, will go ahead as planned.

Moreover, Osborne still plans to slash public spending to 36% of GDP.

The axe will fall particularly hard on local authorities. Between now and 2020 their Whitehall funding is to be slashed by a further 50%, on top of the drastic economies they have had to make over the last five years. Osborne says that he has made up the shortfall by letting them keep all their income from business rates. Osborne also boasts of letting local politicians raise council tax by 2% to protect adult social care, but that is only going to raise a fraction of what is required.

While these last two points refer only to England they are a stark warning of what local governments across the bridge are facing and how the Welsh Government has created a buffer to mitigate some of the worst cuts that English colleagues have been dealing with.
The European Referendum Bill returned to the Commons from the Lords with an amendment to extend the franchise to include 16 and 17 year olds. The Government moves to block this on the grounds of cost was merely an excuse to deny 16 and 17 year olds the opportunity to have a say on a hugely important decision that will have a huge impact on their lives. I had hoped to speak in the debate in support of the Lords amendment but my contribution was cut to 20 seconds.

http://bit.ly/1TAxhLW

Justin Trudeau Canadian Prime Minister

It was an honour and privilege to meet the newly elected Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, when he visited London.

Gas-Fired Power Generator—Steel Works

The Department for Energy and Climate Change have given the green light for the steelworks to build a new gas-fired power plant to help generate its energy needs. This will cut the energy bill and reduce emissions and could play an important part in securing the future of Port Talbot.

Brunel Docks Regeneration

I was delighted to welcome Councillor Hugh James to Parliament to meet with the Prince’s Regeneration Trust and discuss plans to regenerate the Brunel Docks in Briton Ferry. The Prince’s Regeneration Trust were really interested in the ideas the group have for the docks and a follow up meeting is planned for the New Year in Briton Ferry.

Cross Party Consensus On Tidal Lagoon

Together with fellow Labour MP Carolyn Harris, Lib Dem MP Mark Williams, Plaid Cymru MP Liz Saville Roberts and Green MP Caroline Lucas we called on the Government to back the tidal lagoon. http://bit.ly/1TcdqTx

Labour Business Launch

In January I will be launching the new Labour Business group which is the new name for the Labour Finance and Industry Group (LFIG).

The purpose of Labour Business is to broaden and deepen the Labour Party’s engagement with the business community, and the aim of the Labour Business Parliamentary Group will be to provide a forum for Labour MPs, members of Labour Business and invited guests to build and strengthen the Labour Party’s offer to business.

Kellingley Colliery

I co-signed a letter with other coalfield MPs to the Secretary of State for Department for Energy and Climate Change and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, supporting Yvette Cooper in her calls for a better redundancy package for those miners who will be out of work when the last deep mine closed on 18 December. Those miners will only get the minimum statutory payment which is a total betrayal. http://bit.ly/106zJfp

Bravura performance by Angela Eagle

In one of the last PMQs before the Christmas recess Angela Eagle deputised for Jeremy Corbyn and gave a bravura performance against George Osborne who was left floundering over the EU negotiations.
Small Business Saturday

As part of Small Business Saturday I visited local businesses including Jersey Bakery, the Flower Box, and Selections Gift Shop, to celebrate the contribution they make to the local economy and to encourage others to ‘shop local’.

http://bit.ly/1IEm0Ki

Briton Ferry Coffee Morning

Together with David Rees AM and Councillors Colin Morgan and Hugh James, I hosted a coffee morning for constituents in the Lodge, Briton Ferry. The well attended event was a great chance to have a general chat with people about the issues concerning them and to pick up some casework too.

MIND NPT—Morrisons

It was great to take part in the Everest Charity Event to raise money for MIND NPT. In a blustery Morrisons foyer I managed 30 minutes on the cross-trainer and covered 3.2km.

Warburtons

I visited the Warburtons factory on the Baglan Industrial Estate who employ 50 people. It was an interesting visit to learn about their Healthy Eating schools project and I will be visiting Awel Y Mor in the New Year as part of this scheme.

Foodbank

I was delighted to join volunteers at Tesco to help out with the Christmas collection for Port Talbot Foodbank.

Funding Fair

I am hosting a ‘Funding Fair’ in Aberavon Community Centre on 29 January 2016. It brings together the four branches of the Lottery, Coalfield Regeneration and the CVS. If you know of any groups that are interested in funding advice the please let them know.
The River

It was great to attend the premier of ‘The River’. The film, narrated by Michael Sheen, charts the history of the river Afan and its recovery from pollution and looks at the future of the river with the prospect of new unconventional industries coming to the area. I’m hoping for a screening in Parliament.

Tourism Roundtable

Following on from the coffee morning for local group leaders I held soon after becoming MP and the Garnwen Trust tourism event in August, I co-hosted a tourism roundtable with the Garnwen Trust. It brought together groups with an interest in tourism, the Local Authority, NPTC Group and local businesses.

A productive discussion took place around maximising the tourism potential across Aberavon and building on the tourism draws we already have to bring more people into the area.

NSA Afan Christmas Village

NSA Afan’s inaugural Christmas village event was enjoyable, bringing a real Christmas spirit to the town centre. I hope the success will lead to this event becoming a regular feature and growing in both size and popularity to bring more people into Port Talbot.

Christmas Delivery Office

Christmas is a very busy time for the Royal Mail but I was able to pop along to the Eagle Street delivery office to see the work that goes on there to ensure we all get our mail in time for the big day.

Brit Pub chef announced as finalist in Parliamentary Pub Chef of the Year competition

Local pub chef Gordon Jones from the Brit Pub, Port Talbot, has been named as one of the finalists in the British Beer & Pub Association and the All Party Parliamentary Beer Group’s Parliamentary Pub Chef of the Year competition.

I am absolutely delighted that Gordon has made it through to the final four. That is a fantastic achievement when you consider that well over 100 chefs entered the race. The Brit is my local pub and I had no hesitation whatsoever in nominating Gordon for this prestigious award. The food is delicious and the beer is, too.

http://bit.ly/1P5hWnl

Red Cross

The British Red Cross facility in Neath that serves both Neath and Port Talbot invited me along to see the range of services they provide to help people. This included their Home from Hospital scheme and Gofal which helps to combat isolation issues for people aged over 50.

Llandarcy Academy Of Sport

Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, Ken Skates AM visited the Llandarcy Academy of Sport and I joined him on the visit to this superb state of the art facility. If Cardiff bids for the 2026 Commonwealth Games then the facility could be a huge part of the bidding process.
I was delighted to be invited to speak to Labour party members in Llanelli about the challenges facing the party as we rebuild towards victory in 2020.

At a British Influence event in London I addressed the audience on what an exit from the EU would mean for Britain. The only thing that we do know is that a British exit would trigger a huge amount of uncertainty which is not good for the economy.

It was great to meet new members of the Party at a welcome event in St Mary’s Church Hall, Port Talbot. Many had joined during the recent leadership campaign.

Aberavon’s Bay Campus hosted a visit of the Stronger In Europe Campaign. This is the cross-party group that has formed to campaign for the UK to remain in the European Union. It was a chance to talk to businesses and the University about the importance of staying in Europe.

Alan Johnson launched the Labour campaign to stay in Europe in the Midlands. Labour has its own distinct campaign as it has its own distinct arguments for staying in the EU based around jobs, security, investment and workers rights.

You can get involved in the campaign by clicking on this link http://www.labour.org.uk/index.php/inforbritain

I was interviewed by The Times newspaper on Labour’s prospects in the Assembly elections next year and the need to re-engage with the electorate on a positive narrative that people can sign up to. http://bit.ly/1NBKron