

Backbench Business Committee

Proposals for Backbench Debates

Tuesday 18 October 2022

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Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Patricia Gibson; Chris Green; Nigel Mills; Kate Osborne.

Questions 1 - 8

Representations

[I](#): Mrs Flick Drummond and Valerie Vaz.

[II](#): Helen Morgan.

Mrs Flick Drummond and **Valerie Vaz** made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have three applications this afternoon, the first of which is from Flick Drummond and Valerie Vaz, on the peace process in Yemen.

Mrs Drummond: Thank you for allowing us to put our case for a debate on Yemen.

We have not had a debate on Yemen since, I think, 2020, and Yemen is in its seventh year of high-level conflict. The UK has been the penholder for much of that time, so we believe that the UK should be leading on finding a permanent solution to the war.

There is a massive humanitarian crisis, which Valerie Vaz will tell you about, and the war is sometimes called the forgotten war. A debate would raise awareness and, most importantly, allow us to hear from the Government what they are doing to solve this important problem. We would have the opportunity of holding a wide debate, including on the economic collapse, the humanitarian disaster, the migration and displacement of Yemenis, and the military situation. We could also look at the west's reduced support through aid, and the geopolitical situation. There had been a truce for six months, but it came to an end in October and war has since broken out again, so this would be a good and apt time for a debate.

Valerie Vaz: What Flick has not mentioned is that both of us were born in Yemen. I think we would like to go back, but we are not allowed because of the situation there.

As Flick said, we have not had such a debate in the Chamber since 2020. We have had debates in Westminster Hall, but not ones with the full House present. You will see the number of Members on our application, who represent a broad range.

Some 23.4 million people are in need of assistance, but the money is going down—it is £88 million from £1 billion. It is a huge crisis. We have seen the adverts on television showing children starving, and the situation is extremely upsetting.

Those who have visited Yemen know that it is an absolutely beautiful country—the Queen of Sheba was first there—and the people, who show great hospitality, would be able to stand on their own two feet, with support.

We in the House of Commons have seen what effect we can have on international issues, and it is vital that we highlight the case of Yemen, the forgotten war and the forgotten children who have no future. We ask the Committee to give us time in the Chamber for a broad debate in the name of humanity.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q2 Chair: Is there any time sensitivity to the application? The situation in Yemen is obviously relevant, but is there a particular anniversary that is coming up, or a specific time when you might prefer the debate to take place?

Valerie Vaz: I do not really know what your timetable is.

Chair: We have a significant number of debates on the stocks, but we always ask if there is any time sensitivity.

Mrs Drummond: We are quite relaxed about that, but preferably before Christmas.

Valerie Vaz: I would say in November, Chair, if that is possible, just because we are on the back of the last truce, which has been broken. We know that lots of other issues are going on, but it would be useful to be able to highlight this one at some time in November.

Q3 Bob Blackman: Presumably FCDO would be the answering Department, which means that the morning session—9.30 am to 11 am—on Tuesday 8 November in Westminster Hall might be available to you. That would probably be the first slot that you could get.

Mrs Drummond: That would be amazing, because having it on a Tuesday rather than a Thursday would mean that we would get a lot more Back-Bench speakers, which really would be fantastic.

Q4 Chair: But you would be limited to a 90-minute debate if you were in Westminster Hall, although it is a way of getting the debate quickly. If the debate was well oversubscribed, you would not be precluded from coming back to make another application for Chamber time.

Mrs Drummond: That would be kind. I have another two people on that list who came back after I had submitted the application.

Chair: That is a thought, anyway. Thank you very much indeed.

Helen Morgan made representations.

Q5 Chair: Good afternoon, Helen. Your application is for a debate on local consent for fracking.

Helen Morgan: That is right, yes.

On 22 September, the Secretary of State for BEIS made a statement to the House signalling that the Government would be lifting their moratorium on fracking. However, both in the statement delivered to the House and during the Prime Minister's leadership campaign over the summer, it was made clear that local communities will be allowed to express their consent, or withdraw their consent, for gas companies fracking in their areas. However, the statement provided no detail on what the consent process would look like and how people would be able to express or withdraw their consent. Obviously, a parliamentary statement gives each Back Bencher only a minute or so to express their concerns, so I would like a Backbench Business debate to enable Back Benchers to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

further express the concerns—or, indeed, support—of their constituents, with a little more time to explore the process.

There is some time pressure on the debate because there is a suggestion that gas will be flaring within six months, and thrashing out a workable consent mechanism will not necessarily be straightforward. MPs on both sides of the House are keen to express their concerns. Those who are not only supportive of fracking, but opposed to it, as I am, would like to be able to explore the consent process more fully. The debate would be focused on consent, rather than a repetition of previous debates on the pros and cons of fracking.

Q6 Chair: If the debate is on the consent process, I take it that the answering Department would be Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Helen Morgan: I think that that is an open question. My understanding is that it would be a matter for BEIS, because it has led the process so far. I do not think that the consent process is understood. BEIS has indicated that it might just take the form of offering a financial incentive, in which case it would come under that Department. If the process was one of a local vote, I think it would come under DLUHC.

Q7 Bob Blackman: The first opportunity is likely to be Tuesday 1 November, in Westminster Hall. That would be if BEIS was answering, as DLUHC does not answer on that day. On that basis, would you accept 1 November, if it was offered?

Helen Morgan: I would indeed. Yes, that would be great.

Q8 Chris Green: May I clarify one point? Is the debate an opportunity, so to speak, for the Government to clarify their position, or is it an opportunity for Members to set out what they think the process should be?

Helen Morgan: It would be an opportunity for the Government to clarify their position because we do not have a lot of clarity at the moment. Members might make some good suggestions, and also raise concerns about something that looks more like a financial incentive than a proper consent programme. It would be an opportunity to get both those things on the table.

Patricia Gibson: May I ask a question about the answering Department? You have stressed the consent process, but surely that is planning, which I would have thought comes under Levelling Up. The debate is not about fracking as such, but how you get to the point where you can frack or not frack.

Chair: I would agree with the logic of that, but it is up to the Government to decide which Department they want to lead on the process. It would be logical for it to be Levelling Up, but—

Patricia Gibson: If I were the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, and the Business and Energy Department was responding to the debate, I would feel that my territory was being—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: Someone parking tanks on your lawn.

Patricia Gibson: Yes, because it is not really for a Business or Energy Minister if it is about process.

Chair: I would tend to agree with that, but it is in the Government's gift to decide which Department answers. The Cabinet Ministers can battle it out between themselves—I am sure we could sell tickets.

Bob Blackman: We could always get the Cabinet Office to intercede.

Chair: No other colleagues wish to speak, so thank you very much indeed, Helen.

That takes us to the end of the public session. Jim Shannon was due to be with us, but he has not arrived, so we will defer him until next week.