

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Business

Tuesday 13 December 2022

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

Questions 1-15

Representations made

[I](#): Sir Bernard Jenkin

[II](#): Jim Shannon

[III](#): Sajid Javid

Sir Bernard Jenkin made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have three applications in front of us this afternoon, the first of which is from Sir Bernard Jenkin. The application is on the subject of Russian grand strategy. Bernard, over to you.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Thank you very much indeed. Just after the Christmas recess last year, you very kindly granted me time for a debate on the Floor of the House about Russian grand strategy, and it turned out to be an extremely prescient occasion. We were already very preoccupied with the military build-up around Ukraine and what it meant. I managed to set out to the House how Putin's Kremlin thinks and plans. In response, the then Minister of State at the Foreign Office, who is now the Foreign Secretary, said in his winding up that he had learned a great deal from the debate.

Since then, of course, we have had the invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing conflict, and a lot of what we described in that debate has played out. Gas and economic effects are being used as weapons against western Europe. We have seen migration flows, and Russian-inspired terrorist attacks and sabotage of western infrastructure are taking place. Despite how badly the war is going in some respects for President Putin, he is still intent on exploiting the situation.

I know that tomorrow there is a debate on Ukraine, but debates on Ukraine tend to be taken up with the operational situation, the supply of armaments and the refugee consequences; they tend to be far narrower debates. This is a much, much broader question about what Russia's game plan is in the global sphere, and about how they are intent on joining with other actors like Iran and China to try to undermine the global security order upon which western freedom, democracy and prosperity depend. We tend not to discuss what the overall UK/NATO/allied response should be to the global situation, in these debates on Ukraine. So I think this is a very necessary debate.

I have now got 35 names. I forwarded to you very recently the latest update. I hope you have that in front of you. There are 35 names backing this debate, including many considerable figures, from all the main political parties in the House of Commons. I very much hope you will be able to find time for this debate.

I would say that you should not give me 12 January, because I have to be on a Standards Committee away-day, but any other Thursday thereafter, I would be very grateful to accept.

Chair: Thank you. Questions, colleagues?

Q2 **Bob Blackman:** I have just one question. You have narrowed it down in terms of when you could hold the debate in January. Would Thursday 19 fit?

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Perfect.

- Q3 **Kevin Foster:** Is your intention that it will be a motion that the House has considered, or will it be a motion that expresses an opinion?

Sir Bernard Jenkin: We are not seeking to divide the House. It would be just a take-note debate—a subject debate.

- Q4 **Chair:** Thank you. I think you are absolutely right; the debate we had earlier this year was a significant success in terms of attendance and contributions. One aspect of this whole debate that I have been concerned about is Russia's influence, particularly in eastern European politics in the last decade, and the question of them supporting nationalist parties within the eastern European context, which I think has been with one prime objective, which has been to destabilise the connection between eastern Europe and western Europe. That is much more interesting from our perspective.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Incredibly important. First, there is a diversity of response and a sense of urgency among the frontline states of NATO compared with the western European states, although the unity of response across the whole of Europe has been remarkable. The quality of response across Europe has been much more diverse, and I won't name countries that have done incredibly little that should be doing much more.

Also, there is a diversity of opinion about how this Ukraine war ends. Quite a lot of the softer "let's negotiate" approach possibly ignores what Russia's longer-term intentions are and what they would take as a victory from this catastrophe that they have created.

There is also the fact that the Russians have concentrated on destabilising some states, particularly in the Balkans, which remains a powder keg. The Russians have very heavily armed Serbia and Serbian factions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is a very serious question that we tend not to discuss in Ukrainian debates.

And we don't discuss Belarus, which has striven to stay out of this war. It is under intense pressure from the Kremlin to give more active support. Russia has moved its own troops into Belarus, probably against their will. At one stage, the President of Belarus disappeared and has reappeared—this was when he went to a conference in another former Soviet state, to meet President Putin. It appeared he was being detained.

All these matters are very serious, and they tend to get glossed over in the immediate discussion about Ukraine, which is why this debate is so important.

- Q5 **Chair:** It is like six countries across or whatever, but if that sort of activity was happening in the Benelux countries, it would be international news if that sort of scenario was taking place. I think it is absolutely fascinating, Sir Bernard.

Bob has mentioned 19 January. You have confirmed you would be available if that was to be allocated.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Thank you very much indeed. I am most grateful to you. May I go now?

Chair: Indeed. We will be going into closed session and deliberating on the applications that we have heard this afternoon.

Jim Shannon made representations.

Q6 **Chair:** Good afternoon, Jim. You have an application in front of us this afternoon on the effect of the cost of living crisis on sufferers of cystic fibrosis. Jim, over to you.

Jim Shannon: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the Committee as well for giving me the chance to request this debate.

It is some time since we have had any debates on cystic fibrosis, but there are a number of MPs in the Chamber, from all parties, who have a deep interest in this subject matter. The cost of living crisis is a problem for those who have cystic fibrosis because of its impact on the equipment that they have to use to stay alive, on the cost of the energy that that equipment uses and on the family. The Cystic Fibrosis Trust has contacted me specifically to ask for a debate on the issue.

As we all know, CF is a progressive, life-limiting genetic condition. More often than not, people need a transplant to help them get out the other side. I know one of my constituents who has had that operation, but there are many others. There are many complications related to cystic fibrosis, including diabetes, liver disease, osteoporosis and malnourishment. Some 80% of people with CF have pancreatic exocrine insufficiency and therefore need a high-calorie intake to maintain a healthy weight, so the issue is not just with energy but with the diet and the food intake they need to have. Because it is a specific food intake, there is an extra cost involved.

Those with CF are particularly susceptible to lung infections and cannot meet face to face. Their life is very restricted and, in many cases, they are limited to being in their home. I have a very good friend back home who carries oxygen with him 24/7.

How does CF impact people across the whole of the United Kingdom? That is the issue. It is not just England, where there are 9,000 people with it. There are 1,000 in Scotland, 500 in Wales and 500 in Northern Ireland, meaning there are 11,000 people altogether. In 2021 the average age of people with CF was 38. CF demands an incredibly high burden of treatment, which takes two to five hours per day. CF is a disease that impacts people's whole life and everyone around them.

I appreciate the Committee giving me the chance to ask for the debate. The Cystic Fibrosis Trust has said that it does not want the debate until the end of January, to give plenty of time, if that is okay?

Chair: End of January?



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Jim Shannon: Yes.

Q7 **Chair:** It was just that there was potentially an opportunity on the Thursday of the first week back, so are you saying that you would rather take it much later?

Jim Shannon: They have asked me. I don't want to do what I want; I want them to do what they want, if you don't mind.

Chair: Okay, so the end of January would be your preferred slot.

Q8 **Bob Blackman:** Jim, which will be the answering Department?

Jim Shannon: My understanding is that it will be the Department for Health and Social Care.

Q9 **Chair:** Given that it is cost of living, Jim, would it not be DWP?

Jim Shannon: It possibly would be, when I think about it, as it is about the cost of living.

Q10 **Chair:** Or possibly the Treasury?

Jim Shannon: I suppose the point I am making with Health is that it is a health issue, but the debate is about the cost of living and how it impacts upon people, so it probably would be DWP.

Q11 **Bob Blackman:** I suspect, although we do not have the schedule yet, that Tuesday 31 January might well be both Health and Work and Pensions answering. Presumably, you would have to nominate who you would want to answer and make that clear to the Government.

Jim Shannon: On that question, I think the Chairman is right—it probably is DWP—but I am happy to check with them to make sure. If it is about the cost of living, it really has to be DWP, because we are trying to make the case that their health condition is so bad that is affecting their cost of living, energy and everything else. I can check and come back to the Committee to make sure that I have got it right.

Q12 **Chair:** Okay. The application is in, and you have said you would prefer it at the end of January, so we can contact you to see what dates might become available towards the end of January, which might be a Tuesday or a Thursday in Westminster Hall.

Jim Shannon: Tuesday would be preferable just for a change.

Chair: Indeed.

Jim Shannon: I will leave that thought with you.

Sajid Javid made representations.

Q13 **Chair:** Lastly this afternoon, but certainly not leastly, we have Sajid Javid with an application on Holocaust Memorial Day, which occurs towards the end of January.



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Sajid Javid: Thank you, Chairman. This is one of the few parliamentary Committees that I have not appeared before. Thank you for your consideration.

As you say, the application is for a general debate with the title of Holocaust Memorial Day. The requested date would be Friday 27 January next year. The Department requested to respond would be Levelling-up, Housing and Communities.

As for the purpose of the debate, it is fair to say that there is a strong commitment from all parts of the House to remember the holocaust, to education around the holocaust and to remembering the victims of Nazi persecution and subsequent genocides. This opportunity could also be used to raise awareness around current issues and concerns about anything to do with racism, antisemitism or, indeed, prejudice of any kind.

Colleagues will know that this debate has happened in one form or another every year since, I think, 2002. It has always been well attended, and in putting together this application there is already interest from at least 18 colleagues from almost all the major parties.

I can say more, but that is basically the purpose of the debate.

- Q14 **Chair:** We do not normally get allocated Fridays by the Government, so it would normally be a Thursday. The appropriate date would seem to be Thursday 26 January, if that was possible.

Sajid Javid: That would be possible.

Chair: That is subject to us being awarded the time.

Sajid Javid: The 27th was suggested only because that is Holocaust Memorial Day, but the 26th would be perfectly acceptable. We have applied for at least a three-hour debate, if that is possible.

- Q15 **Chair:** Absolutely. The thing is that it would be highly unusual for us to be sitting on a Friday for Backbench debates, so if the Government were to award us time, it would be more likely that we would get Thursday that week.

Sajid Javid: Thursday would be very good, if the Committee were so inclined.

Chair: Okay. Any questions, colleagues? No. First and foremost, we have an application in for this important memorial day, and you have brought it in a timely fashion, so we have plenty of time to plan ahead and warn the Government that we have the application in. If we can warn the Leader's office of such an important application, it is more likely that we will be allocated the time on that day.

Sajid Javid: Thank you for your consideration.