

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 25 April 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 25 April 2023.

Watch the meeting

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

In the absence of the Chair, Bob Blackman took the Chair

Questions 1-17

Representations

[I](#): Wayne David

[II](#): Richard Foord and Jim Shannon

[III](#): Jim Shannon

[IV](#): Jim Shannon

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Wayne David made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the Backbench Business Committee for our normal Tuesday afternoon meeting. I apologise to people who have been waiting to watch us on the screens; we have been delayed by Divisions in the House of Commons Chamber. Equally, the Chairman of the Committee is unfortunately away on parliamentary business, so the Committee asked me to once again to step in to chair the meeting.

We have four applications before us to consider. We may upgrade that as the afternoon wears on. The first application is from Wayne David on preventing obesity and fatty liver disease. Wayne, over to you.

Wayne David: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Blackman. I was just thinking that the reason why I am appearing here today is that I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on liver disease and liver cancer thanks to Sir David Amess. He persuaded me, literally just before his death, that this was an important issue and that it was something that I should become involved in. It is worth mentioning that.

It might surprise people that 10,000 people every year die from liver disease, and the mortality rate has more than doubled in the last 20 years. The projections could well be more again over the next few years unless action is taken. There are two main risk factors for liver disease. The first is quite well known: alcohol misuse. The second is obesity, leading in particular to fatty liver disease. Again, it may surprise people to realise that the UK has the third highest obesity rate in the whole of Europe. The debate would look at this and the reasons for it, but also, significantly, it would look at the ways forward that could be taken collectively by us as a country.

The debate will look in particular at childhood obesity and seek to highlight and analyse why 30% of children in the poorest areas of the United Kingdom suffer from obesity. It will look at the importance of healthy living, and essentially it would look at the early diagnosis that is in place in parts of the country but that needs to cover the whole of the United Kingdom. In this context, we would especially be looking at the examples of Scotland and Wales—Wales in particular because early diagnosis has been one of the priorities of the Government there. We are seeking for that good example to be followed elsewhere in other parts of the United Kingdom.

I am pleased to say that there is cross-party support for this proposition today. We have prominent Conservative Members, including Sir Peter Bottomley, a number of Labour Members, and SNP and Plaid Cymru Members. We certainly think that this warrants a special debate. We would like to stress that, ideally, we would like to see it on Thursday 8 June, because that will be an international day to mark the issue, the need to conquer its causes, and the solutions to it.

Q2 **Chair:** We were going to offer you a Westminster Hall debate, because



HOUSE OF COMMONS

there is then the potential to have a debate earlier—I think we said Tuesday 16 May at 9.30 am. If you would rather have your debate, as you say, on 8 June, we could make those arrangements.

Wayne David: Ideally, that would be preferred, if that is possible.

Q3 **Chair:** Okay. That would have to be in Westminster Hall, I think, because of other allocations that we have already made. Any questions from colleagues? No? Okay. Thank you, Wayne. The Clerks will be in touch with you formally about the arrangements.

Wayne David: Thank you.

Richard Foord and **Jim Shannon** made representations.

Q4 **Chair:** Richard, you have a debate request on establishing a special tribunal to investigate the crime of aggression in Ukraine. Over to you.

Richard Foord: Thank you, Bob. Members may or may not have followed closely the debate around the creation of a special tribunal to prosecute the crime of aggression, which, in international law is regarded as the supreme international crime. When we think about other types of international crime, such as crimes against humanity or genocide—war crimes—they are all crimes that stem from that overarching, supreme crime of aggression.

Members will be aware that there have been moves in recent months to issue an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin in relation to unlawfully deporting children. That arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court is a very welcome development. The idea of creating a special tribunal is sometimes said to be, somehow, a rival court to the International Criminal Court. I would suggest that it is not; rather, this is about having a special tribunal to prosecute the crime of aggression, which cannot be tried in the International Criminal Court because, simply, Russia has not signed up to the International Criminal Court nor have the United States or China.

I am not going to pretend to the Committee that I have constituents clamouring for me to help bring about a debate on this issue. However, I think there are some issues that are very important for Members to pursue none the less and the fact that this has received cross-party support, including from senior Conservative Back-Bench MPs, including the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, suggests that this is something that is very important across the House. I want to stress that though the Government endorsed the idea of a hybrid tribunal back in January, we have not heard a whole lot since and it would be a great opportunity in this debate to explore further the idea of a special tribunal.

Q5 **Chair:** Thank you for that. Jim, do you want to add anything?

Jim Shannon: I support what Richard is putting forward. There has not been a debate on Ukraine where there has not been a demand for a tribunal for accountability for those who have carried out some of the most despicable, wicked and evil crimes: the deportation of children away from



HOUSE OF COMMONS

their families, the bombings of civilians in hospitals, schools and churches and the war crimes against soldiers. There have been absolutely despicable crimes against ladies as well—both women and children from the age of five to the age of 90. There are despicable sexual crimes against them.

What we need and why this debate is so important is the tribunal to ensure that those who think they have got away with these crimes—I believe, as you know, Chair, that they might get away with it in this world but they will not get away with it in the next because of accountability. However, I would love to see them get accountability in this world, so I am fully supportive of what my colleague and friend is trying to achieve.

Q6 Chair: Thank you. Can I clarify what the answering Department would be here? Would it be FCDO or Justice?

Richard Foord: My understanding is that it is the Attorney General's responsibility, but, equally, if the Government felt that this was more in the purview of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, that would also be of interest.

Chair: Fine. Any questions from colleagues?

Q7 Kevin Foster: Having followed some of this, I think it is absolutely right to distinguish between crimes against humanity, which we see prosecuted at the ICC, and crimes of aggression. The attack last year reminded us of the parallels between crimes of aggression committed in 1939 by the Nazi regime and what Putin's regime has done in Ukraine. Do you feel that 90 minutes would be enough, given that there is quite a lot of interest in this particular area? Making the distinction, which has been well put today, may not instantly be apparent, because we are talking about crimes against humanity that have stemmed from an initial crime of aggression. Do you feel that 90 minutes is enough for this?

Richard Foord: It probably is, provided that the debate is very much focused on aggression. We have had several general debates in the Chamber about Ukraine. As my colleague says, many Members have spoken very highly about the idea of having a special tribunal, so I think there needs to be real focus. If there is that real focus, 90 minutes should suffice.

Kevin Foster: Thank you.

Q8 Chair: Having looked at your application, the dates we have available—this depends on whether it is the Attorney General or FCDO answering—would be Tuesday 9 May, or Tuesday 16 May, in Westminster Hall. The Attorney General answers on the 16th, and FCDO will answer on the 9th. We need to clarify which would be the answering Department for you. The hours have been changed because of the bank holiday on the 9th, so the sitting starts, I think, at 11.30. The debate would be from 11.30 till 1 o'clock on that particular day. What we will do is have a discussion with the Clerks and so on about what will be offered, but would either of those dates be okay with you?

Richard Foord: Either would be okay for me. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much for attending. The Clerks will be in touch with you.

Jim Shannon made representations.

Q9 **Chair:** We now move to Jim Shannon for his usual season ticket appearance. By the way, we are only going to take your two applications that are before us, because those are the two that have been received by the Clerks.

Jim Shannon: Right. That is fair enough. I will put the other two back in the queue.

Q10 **Chair:** We will start with the application on Brazil's Mariana dam disaster.

Jim Shannon: I have been asked by a number of people to make representations in relation to this. I will leave these two copies with you, by the way. For some reason—I am not quite sure why—I have all the names and you do not. I don't know why that is, but I will rectify that shortly.

Q11 **Chair:** Just to clarify, Jim, you have more than eight names.

Jim Shannon: Yes, I have about 10. When a tailings dam in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais burst, it released 40 million cubic metres of toxic mining waste, killing 19 people, burying villages, making thousands homeless and affecting the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands more. For those who had to deal with the clean-up, their lives have never got back to normal. The claimants, including representatives of Krenak indigenous communities, are being represented by the London-based international law firm PGMBM. There are also 530 businesses, 25 municipalities and six religious organisations being represented. There is other information here; I am not sure if I need to go into that, but there are two pages.

It is the worse environmental disaster in Brazilian history—by far—and it took place in November 2015. It is going to be one of the largest cases in its history. They had an event here in Westminster, which I attended, along with other MPs, and they suggested that this is what they wanted a debate on.

Really it is a chance to answer the outstanding case against the company. These people need some additional help, and they have sought our help here within the House of Commons to try to highlight this and raise awareness about the matter. Many people have forgotten about it—it was 2015—but those who lived through it have never forgotten it.

Q12 **Chair:** Can we just clarify the answering Department?

Jim Shannon: I would have thought that it would be the FCDO. I am pretty sure that it is.

Q13 **Chair:** Lovely. Any questions, colleagues?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Jim Shannon: Can I make a request to the Committee? You know I always take whatever you give me, and I am very happy to do so, but I will not be here for a few weeks, for the council elections back home.

Q14 **Chair:** When are you back in Parliament?

Jim Shannon: The week beginning 22 May. It is a Monday. Apologies. I don't often ask that.

Chair: No, that's fine.

Jim Shannon made representations.

Q15 **Chair:** The second application that we have from you is extending the UK Government's contracts for difference schemes to Northern Ireland.

Jim Shannon: Mr Chairman, again I apologise to you because I made some inquiries and obviously I was wrong to think that I had to come to the Backbench Business Committee to ask for a 30-minute debate. It is very specific. It is very much on Northern Ireland. It is about extending the UK Government's contracts for difference schemes to Northern Ireland. That being the case, it is the Energy Minister who will respond to it. Because it is only half an hour that I am looking for—

Q16 **Chair:** What you need to do is either apply for an end-of-day Adjournment debate or a 30-minute debate in Westminster Hall via the Deputy Speaker, through the ballot. We only allocate 90 minutes or three hours.

Jim Shannon: I don't need that because it is very specifically 15 minutes to set the scene and 15 minutes for the Minister. Those were the two. Obviously, I will do what you ask me to do.

Q17 **Chair:** I understand you have two further applications; however, they will need to be submitted through the office because they have not been received, for one reason or another. Can I suggest that you pass those in straightaway? We cannot deal with them today, obviously, but we will deal with them when our next meeting takes place.

Jim Shannon: Do I need to be at the next meeting?

Chair: That is something that we need to resolve—whether there will be a meeting next week or not.

Jim Shannon: It is just that I am not going to be here next week. I might be here the week after. It depends on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, but for the election week I will definitely not be here. I can leave them with you. Is that okay?

Chair: Once they are submitted, we can consider them at the appropriate time, when you are available to present them.

Jim Shannon: The important one is the inshore industry fishing crews one. It is time specific.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: We will have a look at them once they are submitted.

Jim Shannon: Thank you very much.

Chair: That concludes the formal business for today. We will now go into closed session to make decisions.