

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Business

Tuesday 11 July 2023

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

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Representations made

[I](#): Dan Carden

[II](#): Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

[III](#): Yasmin Qureshi and Hannah Bardell

Dan Carden made representations.

Q1 Chair: Good Good afternoon and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We are starting a little early because we do not want to clash with a whole series of Divisions that will take place in the House subsequently. We have three applications in front of us this afternoon. The first is led by Mr Dan Carden. Dan, your application is on the United Kingdom's relationship with Mexico. Due to the timings that we are expecting today, we have everyone's written applications and have read through them, so please give us a concise run through of why you are applying.

Dan Carden: Thank you, Chair; I can be very brief. The request is for a debate on the UK's relationship with Mexico, in the light of our imminent accession to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, and the ongoing trade negotiations for a new UK-Mexico trade deal. I was hoping that, in the light of Mexican Independence Day on 16 September, there may be space in the Westminster Hall diary to mark that occasion. There is interest across both Chambers in Mexico. We have completed many exchanges, including with the British Group Inter-Parliamentary Union visit to Mexico last November.

There continue to be some human rights issues that have been of interest to UK Members of Parliament, with disappearances of affected family members based in the United Kingdom, and our embassy in Mexico City has been taking those up, with the help of parliamentarians. There is lots to be debated. There is also a great cultural link between our two countries. It is one of the oldest diplomatic relationships that we have, dating back over 200 years. I would be looking for perhaps an hour or an hour and a half in Westminster Hall to allow Members to debate the relationship. *[Interruption.]*

Chair: Don't panic, everyone—that is the Division bell for the Lords.

Bob Blackman: Your application is for Westminster Hall for a Tuesday. Unfortunately, the relevant Tuesday that you have asked for is already taken, but there is an opportunity for the Thursday that week, if you wish, or the previous week.

Q2 Chair: The Thursday of that week would be the 14th, which is two days before Mexico's Independence Day. That would seem appropriate to me, if you were able to take it.

Dan Carden: Unfortunately, my diary means that I personally could not do that date, but I would be happy for the debate to go ahead if I could secure the interest of another Member to lead it on that day.

Q3 Bob Blackman: What about if it was the week before?

Dan Carden: Yes, that would suit me.

Bob Blackman: The 7th.

Chair: We can work on that, Dan. Thank you very much indeed.



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Patricia Gibson: I note your comment that you want it to coincide with Mexico's Independence Day. I would just like to say that it is always nice to see a Unionist celebrating the independence of other countries.

Chair: It is perfectly okay if it is not one of your former colonies.

Patricia Gibson: Aye, well—you might say that; I couldn't possibly comment.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. That is much appreciated, Dan.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown made representations

Q4 **Chair:** Next up is Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, whose application is on VAT reclaim on foreign shopping.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Thank you, Chair, for considering my application. This has been an ongoing, cross-party campaign, which has received considerable traction recently, with media coverage across some major outlets. New data has shown that significant damage is being done to the British economy and our global reputation by being the only European country not to offer tax-free shopping to international visitors. High-spending tourists are being diverted from Britain and spending elsewhere. That is having a hugely negative knock-on impact on hotels, restaurants, cultural institutions and areas that benefit from tourism across the country, because people tend to go from London to the rest of the country.

The data company Global Blue says that tax-free shopping by American visitors to the UK has rebounded to only 104% of pre-pandemic levels in the first three months of this year, whereas in France it is 313%. Data suggest a net gain of about £350 million to the Exchequer from introducing tax-free shopping, with Oxford Economics forecasting that it could boost the total economy by £4.1 billion, supporting 78,000 jobs.

In this campaign with my colleagues, many of whom signed their name to this debate application today—we have only been at it a very short time, and we have 18 names to the debate across three parties—others are also involved. They include the Association of International Retail, Heathrow Airport, Mulberry, Primark, Fenwick, and major tourist attractions such as the English National Opera and Shakespeare's Globe. This issue impacts London and a lot of the UK's important outlets.

We believe that this would be a timely topic for the House to debate, because of the considerable amount of data, and the number of organisations involved in the campaign and the press campaign. I think last week there were two articles—not one—in one issue about this issue. We believe that its time has come and, as I say, I have 18 signatures to this application, across three parties.

Chair: Thank you, much appreciated. Questions.

Q5 **Bob Blackman:** You have applied for a 90-minute debate in the main



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Chamber, but you have enough speakers to warrant a three-hour debate there. It is a general debate, and we would normally allocate general debates to Westminster Hall. The choice is yours, because it is your application, but we offer three-hour debates in the main Chamber—although they never actually last three hours, because they get squeezed. Once again, it is up to you. We could certainly offer you a Westminster Hall debate. Alternatively, you might consider tabling a potentially divisible motion on your application, which we would have to debate in the main Chamber, because that is the only place we can allocate a debate on a divisible motion—it might be, for example, “That this House calls on the Government to introduce tax-free shopping.”

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Thank you for that advice, Bob. Obviously, we would prefer a debate in the main Chamber, and we are happy to produce a divisible motion, if that would stop us from being squeezed. On the other hand, if the only slot available is in Westminster Hall, we are happy to accept that. We are also happy to accept a slot after the summer recess, if that helps your Committee, Chair.

Bob Blackman: It would certainly be after the summer recess.

Q6 **Chair:** It would certainly be after the summer recess, Sir Geoffrey. Basically, our main Chamber slots have been full for several weeks in the lead-up to the recess, but if you wanted to produce a divisible motion, we can surely, probably, fit you in on Thursday 14 September in the Chamber. That is the second week back after the summer recess.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: May I negotiate behind the scenes?

Q7 **Chair:** Indeed, by all means. Please be in touch with our Clerk. Having said that, if you did not want to produce a divisible motion, we could fit you into Westminster Hall on the Thursday of the first week back after the summer recess. Okay?

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Would that be a three-hour debate in Westminster Hall?

Chair: That is a possibility, but most likely it would be a 90-minute debate.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I will negotiate with your Clerk. Thank you for the courtesy of hearing me. Thank you, members of the Committee.

Chair: Thank you.

Yasmin Qureshi and Hannah Bardell made representations.

Q8 **Chair:** Lastly—but definitely not leastly this afternoon—we have Yasmin Qureshi and Hannah Bardell. Come and make yourselves comfortable. Your application this afternoon is on hormone pregnancy tests and the substantive issue of the drug Primodos.

Yasmin Qureshi: Some members of the Committee are probably aware of the fact that I have been campaigning on this issue for the past 12 years, I think, having set up the APPG in 2011. We would like a debate in



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the main Chamber, because we have a motion that we wish to be voted on.

Briefly, the background is that in the '50s, '60s and early '70s, a number of women were given the drug called Primodos to see whether they were pregnant. As a result—we have evidence to show this—thousands of children were born with disabilities.

I was approached by a constituent about this when I became an MP in 2010, which then led me to meet Marie Lyon, who is the lady who is involved in the group that has been working on this. Since then, I have set up the APPG—I thank all my parliamentary colleagues across the political divide for the fantastic support that they have given me. The APPG has 133 members, and we are an active bunch. We have had quite a few debates on this issue in the Chamber.

However, the reason that we need this debate now—we have not had one on Primodos for, I think, almost five years—is that the former Prime Minister, Theresa May, set up the Cumberlege review. It was done by Baroness Cumberlege, who used to be a Conservative Health Minister many years ago. She looked at three different medical issues: sodium valproate, the mesh and Primodos. Her recommendation was that this was avoidable harm. She felt that the victims should be compensated and that there should be proper systems put in place.

Sadly, since the publication of the report in 2020, and despite trying, we have not been able to get proper meetings with Ministers. They do not want to discuss this issue with us. Beforehand, they were using the fig leaf of a legal case, but that has now gone because, essentially, the High Court said that we did not have enough legal funding to do that. However, there are substantive issues. We basically want to see a motion saying that we want the Cumberlege review's recommendations put into place, because the people who have suffered for many years now need to be compensated. We want this issue to be addressed properly and we want our colleagues to be able to speak on it. Hannah, who is vice-chair of the APPG, has been acting with me, and I am sure that she will want to add a few comments.

Hannah Bardell: I will be brief, because I do not want to detain the Committee any longer. I want to pay tribute to Yasmin and her team for fighting on this for so long. It is one of the first issues that constituents came to me with when I was first elected in 2015. My constituent Wilma Ord and her daughter Kirsteen have been profoundly impacted. As Yasmin says, there have been many challenges for the campaign, and Marie Lyon has fought tirelessly, but we are at the stage now where the legal case has been struck down.

However, there are many questions left from the Cumberlege review. I think it is incumbent on the Government to really consider this. We have very strong cross-party support, and many Conservative Members feel strongly about this as well. We need to go back to that review, properly look at it and properly investigate what more can be done for the victims,



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because it has been decades. We now have parents of those children dying, never getting justice and never getting even the absolution that they sought, because they have been blamed for the injury that was done to their own children. I genuinely believe that this is one of the great scandals of our time, and this Parliament needs to step up. As Yasmin and I have both said, there is serious cross-party support and it goes to the heart of the difference that can be in this place. It is not always adversarial; there is genuine cross-party support and work on this issue, and I think it would be good to have that aired in the main Chamber.

Yasmin Qureshi: May I just say that James Grundy is here? He is the Member of Parliament for Leigh. He also supports our campaign.

Q9 **Wendy Morton:** I remember this being debated in the Chamber a couple of years ago—maybe it is five years, I cannot remember; time flies. Just one quick question: I can see this is really well supported. We would normally be looking for a few more Government Members to balance it out. Is that possible? I only counted three, that was all.

Yasmin Qureshi: There should be more, I think.

Wendy Morton: I have three Government Members out of the 24 in total.

Yasmin Qureshi: Selaine Saxby has also written to say that she will support the debate. I know that we have had in the past people like Jacob Rees-Mogg. Who is the MP for Harpenden? I cannot remember his name. We have had quite a few Conservative Members of Parliament who have been involved. It is striking that Rishi Sunak has constituents affected by this. There are quite a few senior people who do.

Chair: Thank you. Are there any further questions?

Q10 **Bob Blackman:** Obviously, we will not be able to allocate this time before the summer recess. Are there any pressures on you when we come back in September, because that is when we would be allocating potential times?

Yasmin Qureshi: When we come back, if it can be done in September, that will be great and very helpful.

Q11 **Chair:** Bearing in mind what Wendy is considering, perhaps you could submit, say, two more Government Members' names. The application is in. Should those additional names be received, there is a slot on the first Thursday back, 7 September, which would be the first slot in the afternoon. You have a divisible motion, so you would have that first slot in the afternoon, if you could do that.

Yasmin Qureshi: I will get the two Conservative Members. I know I will be able to get that.

Wendy Morton: I ask everyone the same question, don't worry.

Chair: In that case, can I thank you both for the motion? I know it does not seem like very long since you had the last debate five years ago, but



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that is just because I was sitting here in the Chair and it does not seem like two minutes. Thank you very much.

We will now go into private session to discuss what to do with today's applications and other business.