

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 2 September 2025

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Members present: Bob Blackman (Chair); Jess Brown-Fuller; Jonathan Davies; Mary Glendon; Alison Hume; Will Stone; Martin Vickers; Chris Vince.

Questions 1-14

Representations made

[I](#): Rachel Blake

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Rachel Blake made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Backbench Business Committee. This afternoon, as we regroup after the summer recess, we will hear applications from colleagues for debates in the Chamber and in Westminster Hall.

The first application, from Rachel Blake, is for a general debate on the International Day of Democracy, for 90 minutes on a Tuesday morning in Westminster Hall. Over to you, Rachel.

Rachel Blake: Thank you, Chair. I am bringing forward a cross-party proposal for a debate on or around 15 September, which is International Day of Democracy.

I know that many of you will be as concerned as I am about the decline in trust in politics. Just 12% of people trust Governments to put the interests of the nation above those of their own party, and only 19% think that the system of governing Britain needs little or no improvement. I think that that will rally us all to debate and consider the topic together.

In 2024, global freedom declined for the 19th consecutive year, according to reporting on Freedom House. There were 60 countries that experienced a deterioration in their political rights and civil liberties, and only 34 secured improvements. Since being elected, I have campaigned on this issue, and I have experienced it at first hand through the experience of my constituents—I have stood up for my constituent Jimmy Lai—and as the new chair of the all-party parliamentary group for compassion in politics. I was concerned about the recent Speaker's Conference, which highlighted that over half of MPs report that abuse has made them feel unsafe.

The Chamber and Westminster Hall have considered really important debates about the future of political donations and the role of foreign donors in our democracy, and about the UK's electoral system and how we can restore trust in politics. I do not believe that the House has marked the International Day of Democracy since 2017. The Government is acting on that with an elections White Paper, preceding a Bill later this year, so I believe that International Day of Democracy marks an important opportunity to take stock of the state of democracy in the UK and around the world and to advocate for strengthening and building resilience in our democratic institutions.

Q2 **Chair:** The nearest date we can offer would be 16 September. If that were offered to you, would you be in a position to lead the debate?

Rachel Blake: Yes.

Chair: Thank you. Are there any other questions from colleagues? No. Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch with you very soon.

Liz Jarvis made representations.

Q3 **Chair:** This is an application for a three-hour debate in the Chamber on the 200th anniversary of the modern railway. Before you start, Liz, let me



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say that prior to our meeting we were informed that the draw for Westminster Hall has taken place, and a debate with a very similar title has been granted for next week in Westminster Hall at, I believe, 4.30 pm on Wednesday.

Liz Jarvis: Oh, I did not know that.

Chair: I don't know whether that affects what you wish to do.

Liz Jarvis: It will affect it. Who put that forward? I have had a lot of cross-party support for my application, including from the Chair of the Transport Committee and the Member for Stockton West, which was the home of the first railway.

Chair: Alan Strickland put it forward and has been granted a debate. He has not signed your form, has he?

Liz Jarvis: And are they doing the 200th anniversary?

Chair: Yes.

Liz Jarvis: Okay. I feel that that kind of negates my one. Never mind.

Chair: It is up to you. By all means you can present your application, and we can determine it and see whether it can go on the list. By the way, we will not be in a position to grant the application for the Chamber for quite some time, in any case. It might be an early application for the 201st anniversary.

Liz Jarvis: I am glad that the debate is happening. Obviously, it is very important to me and my constituents in Eastleigh, because it is a railway town, so I am glad that there will be the opportunity to speak in that debate. I am happy to withdraw this one.

Chair: That's your choice. You can leave it with us.

Liz Jarvis: I think that, just because of timing and everything, it is not going to work out. All right—thank you very much.

Martin Vickers: Chair, I should just declare an interest: I supported the application.

Sam Carling made representations.

Q4 **Chair:** This application is for a three-hour debate in the Chamber.

Sam Carling: Thank you very much, Chairman. Thank you to everyone for giving me the opportunity to present this application. I have a fairly rural constituency with a significant number of farmers in it, and I am regularly approached by that community about the impact of import standards on their business. What I mean by that, essentially, is the rules and regulations governing imports of farming products, both pastoral and arable, into the UK.



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While we rightly hold our own farmers to high animal welfare standards, as well as prohibiting damaging pesticides and other methods like that in our agriculture, we allow products to be imported from overseas that do not meet the same standards, thereby undermining our own farmers and damaging the animal welfare and environmental standards that we are trying to uphold in this country. We have consumers who are regularly buying pork from pigs kept in sow stalls. Denmark, Spain and Poland, for example, are three countries that still allow that, as I understand it, yet they account for a very significant proportion of our pork imports into the UK.

Similarly, there are risks around eggs from battery farms, and also foie gras from force-fed ducks and geese. The import of that is on the rise at the moment, actually. I have figures along the lines of 628 tonnes imported from the EU in 2023, but there is an RSPCA estimate that it was 200 tonnes in 2021, so that is a really steep increase there. Of course, with all the new trade deals that the Government are agreeing at the moment, it is particularly topical at the moment.

Essentially, as well as highlighting the need to be better on this going forward in trade deals, this is also an opportunity for us to discuss legislative solutions to perhaps banning certain levels of imports of low-welfare and "low environmentally friendly" products. I have a significant amount of support for it: I think 20 Members, including me, are supporting the debate, from a variety of constituencies and a variety of parties. Just to clarify, the answering Department would be DEFRA.

Q5 Chair: That is fine. What do you actually hope to achieve by having the debate?

Sam Carling: A variety of things. As I say, the key thing is to stress to the Government, going forward with trade deals, that this is something that matters a lot to our constituents and to the country more broadly, particularly those farming communities who we really need to show that we are supporting. It gives us an opportunity to discuss possible legislative options as well, both in terms of animal welfare and with regard to trying to promote better use of pesticides around the world.

Chair: Any questions, colleagues? Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Jen Craft made representations.

Q6 Chair: Our next application, from Jen Craft, is for a general debate on seafarers' welfare, for 90 minutes in Westminster Hall on either a Tuesday or Thursday.

Jen Craft: Thank you, Chair, for giving me a little time to speak about why I have requested this debate. One would hope that it goes without saying that we are an island nation. Like many Members, I have a port in my constituency, and it provides a significant amount of employment for local people, but it also provides a lot of employment for seafarers.



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Seafarers are the most common users of the port, but their welfare is quite often overlooked. Those in the industry quite often refer to a “sea blindness” that people in this country have: we rely on seafarers for pretty much everything we eat, wear, use and so on, but we are fairly blind to the plight of seafarers and to the sometimes fairly awful conditions that they have to endure.

The vast majority of companies look after seafarers’ welfare fairly reasonably, but even then, they can expect to be away from home, family and friends for six to nine months at a time. They cannot enjoy things we take for granted, such as wi-fi and connectivity. I have visited the QVSR—the seamen’s rest—in my constituency, which provides excellent respite for seafarers. One of the things the QVSR does is provide that really vital link to home. It really struck me how one of the first things people do when they get off the ship is head to the little phone booth that they have set up, to sit and just phone their loved ones and see how they have got on for the last three months or so, after having had absolutely no contact with them.

Female seafarers are a small subset of the seafaring workforce—they make up only about 2% of it—but the prevalence of sexual harassment among them is fairly awful. Quite often, they have no recourse and no one they can contact, because the only people they speak to on a day-to-day basis are their crew mates, who are in a fairly confined environment.

I thought that this debate would be an excellent opportunity for Members who have ports in their constituency to show support for the people who make our lifestyle here possible, although given our position as an island nation, I hope it will also be embraced by those who do not have a port. It would also be a chance to highlight some of the really brilliant work that is done by charities. The work on seafarers’ welfare, by and large, is done by the charitable sector. The debate would be a real opportunity to highlight some of that work, because people are really unaware of it.

It is bizarre: I have lived in my patch my whole life, but I never set foot in the port of Tilbury until I became an MP. It is right there, but there is no reason to do it. People just do not know what goes on behind that wall—they do not know about the lives of the people who let us live how we do. It would be a great opportunity to shine a bit of light on that.

Q7 Chris Vince: This is a really important debate. When you talk about seafarers, are you specifically thinking about the merchant navy and fishermen, or would you also be talking about the Royal Navy? I have mentioned today that I am a teacher, so with that hat on, can I ask whether you think there is an opportunity to talk about education and greater awareness among young people about the port of Tilbury, for example?

Jen Craft: Thanks for mentioning that you are a teacher. I don’t think I knew that about you—I don’t think any of us was aware of that.
[Laughter.]



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The debate encompasses all seafarers—a seafarer being someone who goes to sea. Interestingly, in my patch, we have mainly merchant navy, but we also have a cruise terminal, so cruise crew make up a decent proportion of seafarers. They have their own unique challenges as well. The point about education is really interesting, because the port of Tilbury does a lot of work with local schools, but that knowledge of the really important part that the sea plays in our life as an island is quite often overlooked.

Q8 **Chair:** Which would be the answering Department?

Jen Craft: I imagine it would be Transport.

Martin Vickers: You mentioned Immingham, in my constituency, in your application, and I am aware of the organisation. I fully support the application, Chair. They do excellent work.

Chair: Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Claire Young made representations.

Q9 **Chair:** The next application, from Claire Young, is for a debate on consumer-led flexibility for a just transition. This is for a general debate in Westminster Hall on either a Tuesday or a Thursday.

Claire Young: Thank you very much, Chair. I am applying for a 90-minute Westminster Hall debate. It was inspired by the release of a report I have before me, which talks about consumer-led clean power. At the moment, there is a mismatch between demand and supply for our electricity grid. There are times when wind turbine owners are being paid not to produce electricity because we cannot use it, and yet there are other times when gas is having to be used to supplement the renewables.

The point about flexibility is to try to manage that supply and demand to better match them. For example, if somebody has an electric car, they get home from work in the evening, connect it up, and tell it when they next want to travel and how far. But instead of just plugging it in and charging it in that peak demand period when everyone has got home from work, they can, if there is electricity in the battery, use that to feed back to the grid, and then have it charge in the quieter period overnight.

It is an emerging area. It is important because it has the potential to help the resilience of our grid and to reduce the speed at which we need to bring on new infrastructure. It also has the potential to bring down bills, hence the reference to a just transition. This is an opportunity. It can be brought on much more quickly than, for example, building new power stations and so forth. It is important for MPs to talk about it because it is important from a cost of living point of view, and from my work on the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, I know that there is a lot of focus on how the energy is produced. The argument that the report I have with me makes is that we need to look more urgently at how we manage the demand.

The debate would not only give MPs an opportunity to discuss this, but put the issue on the radar of Ministers and give them a chance to respond and set out in more detail what their approach is. I have signatories from Labour, Lib Dem and Green party MPs who all agree that this is an important issue.

Q10 **Chair:** Thank you. To be clear, what would the answering Department be?

Claire Young: The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Chair: Okay. Any questions from colleagues? If not, thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch.

Martin Rhodes made representations.

Q11 **Chair:** The next application, from Martin Rhodes, is for a debate on the role of Fairtrade certification in UK business and trade. Once again, this is for a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday or a Thursday.

Martin Rhodes: Trade as a subject is obviously very much at the top of the political agenda at the moment. In the international context, there is a debate about tariffs. In the UK, the post-Brexit trade deals and the launch of the UK Government's new trade strategy all mean that issues around trade are prominent.

The new UK trade strategy does mention issues around responsible business conduct in trade and supply chains and sourcing policies, and highlights Fairtrade certification as one way in which that process of supply chains is managed and certified. This is also an area of growing public interest around trade, as supply chains and sourcing policies become consumer concerns—for instance, around forced labour in supply chains. There is also a growth of consumer interest in ethical brands.

Parliamentarians have shown a significant cross-party interest in the issue of Fairtrade. There were 66 signatories to a recent EDM on Fairtrade and there are over 30 members of the all-party parliamentary group on Fairtrade, which I chair. There are over 180 Fairtrade community groups across the UK, the vast majority of which engage with Members of Parliament. That may well be one of the influences on why Members of Parliament are interested in the subject.

The subject of Fairtrade has not been debated for over five years; it was last debated in a Westminster Hall debate in 2020. In that period, the global trade landscape has changed significantly, and the UK's position in terms of its trade has also changed significantly. A Westminster Hall debate would therefore offer parliamentarians an opportunity to discuss the subject.

Q12 **Chair:** Thank you, Martin. Just to confirm, what would the answering Department be, if it is allocated?

Martin Rhodes: Business and Trade.

Chair: Any questions? No, everyone is happy. Thank you very much. The

Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Martin Vickers made representations.

Q13 Chair: Our final application this afternoon is from a member of the Committee, Martin Vickers, who will be presenting an application on the future of the oil refining sector. This is for a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday morning. For the waiting public out there, this means that Martin will take no part in the decision on the allocation of the debate—or in the determination of the debate either.

Martin Vickers: Thank you, Chair. The main reason that I am requesting the debate is that the Prax Lindsey oil refinery in my constituency is threatened with closure. It is at present being administered by the receivers on behalf of the Government. This will potentially affect—the figures vary—400-plus directly employed staff and a massive amount of people in the supply chain and associated industries. It would be a major blow to the local economy. The refinery itself is located in the North Lincolnshire council area, which receives £2.6 million in business rates from Lindsey Oil, so the impact on council services is potentially enormous.

Most of the employees and supply chain people live in the North East Lincolnshire council area. Along with Melanie Onn—we are the two MPs who represent North East Lincolnshire—I had a meeting with the chief executive of the council last week. We were told that according to the council's estimates, 1,134 people will be impacted either directly by the loss of jobs or in the supply chain or associated businesses. In terms of local issues, it is an enormous one. It also begs the question of national priorities for energy security.

There are only five refineries left in the UK, two of which are in my constituency and one is Lindsey Oil. They produce 10% of the country's needs, but energy Ministers have decided that that can be absorbed by the market. Phillips 66, which operates the other refinery in my constituency, tells me that all the refineries in the UK are running at capacity.

We are looking at further imports, which is potentially damaging in a very difficult world situation. Hence, although three or four of the applicants who have signed are representatives from the Humber region and will be directly affected, it clearly has a UK perspective to it. I hope that a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall would allow us to discuss the wider implications as well as the impact on my constituency.

Chair: Any questions, colleagues?

Q14 Alison Hume: I think you are a bit short on Government names.

Martin Vickers: Yes. I am told by my office that we have two more people on board today, though I cannot tell you who they are at the minute, but I agree. Obviously, as a member of the Committee, I am very mindful of the need to have a balanced number of signatures.



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Chair: Any other questions? No. Thank you, Martin. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

That concludes the public business of this meeting. The Committee will now retire to consider the applications in private.