

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 24 April 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 24 April 2018.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Colin Clark; Nigel Mills; Mr William Wragg.

Questions 1-14

Representations made

[I:](#) Angus Brendan MacNeil, Kate Green and Mr Alistair Carmichael

[II:](#) Jim Shannon

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



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Angus Brendan MacNeil, Kate Green and Mr Alistair Carmichael made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Backbench Business Committee. We have two applications in front of us this afternoon, the first of which is being presented by Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil and Kate Green.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Thank you very much, Chair. We are basically looking for a debate around 15 May—preferably on 15 May, which is the International Day of Families. As you are probably aware, we have a private Member's Bill going through on refugee family reunion that has a lot of support. I think five political parties voted for it on the day and seven political parties support it generally in the House.

We had to shorten the debate on that day. A number of people wanted to speak, and I think a number of people learned things through the debate. Another debate would be another stage to air that in the context—as well as the wider context—of the International Day of Families. Families being divided across borders is something that needs a particular focus. I think it would be of great use and great value in the wider scheme of things if we could find a date for such a debate.

Kate Green: There is no doubt about the political salience of this and the interest in it now. As Angus says, it is an issue that commanded a lot of public attention at the time of the Second Reading of the Bill just the other day. Again, with it having been a Friday, there will have been many Members who, due to constituency commitments, were not able to participate in that debate but who would wish to speak on behalf of the many organisations that I know exist in all our constituencies that have very strong views on this matter. A debate would be viewed in a very positive light in a wide range of audiences and communities.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Just to emphasise the cross-party nature of this, Alistair Carmichael from the Liberals and Bob Neill from the Tories hoped to be here today as well. Lisa Nandy also asked me to say that she supports the debate but missed the deadline for the application. [Interruption.] Here is the aforementioned Alistair Carmichael just walking in through the door.

Mr Carmichael: Apologies for my lateness.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: We are just making the case for the debate, and the way being held on a Friday meant that many people who would have spoken couldn't.

Q2 **Chair:** Is there anything you would like to add, Alistair?

Mr Carmichael: That is it in a nutshell, really. You know the background here. There is also the wider context of the discussions between the Government and Angus in relation to the progress of his private Member's Bill, so there are points on process issues as well as substantive issues that stand to be made here. It was apparent from the number of people

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who stayed on that Friday that there would be a fairly easy audience for this.

- Q3 **Mr Wragg:** I thank you for your application, Angus, which is totally in order. In terms of the process that Alistair alluded to, whereabouts in the queue, as it were, is your Bill for Committee stage at the moment?

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Thank you for the question. I understand that we are at No. 4. There is no clear timetable for when the Bill will enter Committee stage. That is one of the reasons why we believe we should have this debate, because it would let a wider audience see the importance that Members attach to this. As Alistair has just said, many were there on the Friday, and many wanted to be there who weren't there. With the lack of a clear timeframe, a debate is quite apposite.

- Q4 **Mr Wragg:** I am on the Bill Committee for Steve Reed's Bill on mental health units and so forth. It was only today that the money resolution for that to proceed was on the Order Paper, so I was just curious as to where yours was in the queue.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: You don't know where that one is in the queue, do you?

Mr Wragg: The money resolution is coming forward for that. It is in Committee at the moment, but it has been bogged down because it has not had the money resolution. That is forthcoming today, so I wondered if that might move things along a little bit.

- Q5 **Bob Blackman:** First, although you have a good spread of speakers, you are a bit short on Government Members. I strongly suggest that you try to encourage some of them to speak in the debate.

The second issue is one of timing. You talked about having the debate on or around 15 May, which is a Tuesday, and this Committee realistically only gets Thursdays for allocation in the Chamber. If we get time—at the moment we do not have the time allocated for May—would you prefer a debate on the Thursday beforehand or the Thursday afterwards? Or would you like an early offering of 3 May?

Angus Brendan MacNeil: I did not quite grasp the significance of 3 May—the Scottish antennae were not as alert to it—until the guffawing, or the choking, to my left and right. Obviously I would prefer Tuesday 15 May, but I realise that your question was not framed in such a way. I am open to either side. It is probably better a day or two after—maybe 17 May would be the better Thursday for it.

I take your point about Government side speakers. There were some on the Government side last time, who certainly had plenty to say. Hopefully we will have a chance to address that and further inform you on it, but there are certainly Government speakers there. I imagine there will be one or two more—I should not name names—who would probably speak for the Bill from the Government side, and maybe even some against.

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A general debate on the family would not be as adversarial as a Bill motion, so it could be a helpful discussion for Members. One other caveat I have is that on Thursday, as Alistair said, many people are away. The further you are away, the more you tend to go on a Thursday (afternoon), but we will take Thursday afternoon if there is nothing (else).

- Q6 **Bob Blackman:** We should be clear that the Committee gets its allocation of time from the Government. Generally speaking, it is a Thursday, unless the Government specifically allow some time earlier in the week. It is extremely unlikely that that will be the case, so this debate will get allocated a Thursday at some (stage).

Kate Green: That would also give us time to engage civil society organisations, and they will then ensure that there is wide publicity for the forthcoming debate. It will cast Parliament in a very good light. I think the debate on Angus's Bill cast Parliament in a very good light in terms of public perception. It would give us a good opportunity to re-engage with support and interest in the wider community.

- Q7 **Chair:** We recently had experience of having a Tuesday slot pre-allocated, and then having it wrested from our grasp on the day by other events, so it is more likely that we will get a slot that works on a Thursday. Thank you very much for your application.

Next up is Mr Jim Shannon, making good use of his season ticket to the Backbench Business Committee.

Jim Shannon made representations.

- Q8 **Chair:** Good afternoon, Jim. Your application is about raising standards of infection prevention and control in the (NHS).

Jim Shannon: Mr Chairman, and Committee members, it has been a while since I was here but it is always a pleasure to come back.

My request for a debate is as you outlined. The reason for it is to tie in with World Hand Hygiene Day on 5 May, which will come upon us very quickly, as we all know. The debate focuses on the NHS and infection prevention, but it will give us an opportunity to hear from back home and to utilise a world-acknowledged day, for the simple reasons I have put forward.

UK healthcare-associated infections cost lives and money. Some 300,000 healthcare-associated infections every year cost the NHS in excess of £1 billion annually. I hope—as you know, Mr Chairman, this is always my way of doing things—to raise the issue to try to make a change, not to embarrass anyone. That is my purpose. If we could encourage Government to roll out their strategy to reduce hospital infections and to publish their staff hand hygiene indicator, that would give us a methodology whereby we could do that. We look forward to the Government's response on that.

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Bob Blackman: Obviously it is an important issue, and marking World Hand Hygiene Day on 5 May is clearly important. I wonder if you would want a debate on 3 May, in advance of World Hand Hygiene Day, to draw attention to this particular important issue.

Jim Shannon: I heard you mention 3 May beforehand. Yes, if you have it available, I will certainly take it.

Q9 **Nigel Mills:** Six hours?

Jim Shannon: No, I wouldn't take six hours. I am conscious that I am not sure that we could fill that time. Maybe I could talk for six hours!

Q10 **Bob Blackman:** That brings me to my other point. Notwithstanding the issue of there not being any Government speakers, there aren't any speakers on your request apart from you.

Jim Shannon: I purposely did not go round. I could certainly go and do the lobbying, but the organisation itself gave me a number of MPs who were interested. I did not go beyond that, for no other reason than time. I really did not have the time in the last few weeks. I have been doing other things out of the House that have taken me away. It also means that I cannot do a Thursday. Unfortunately, I just cannot do Thursdays for the next few weeks.

Q11 **Bob Blackman:** If you do not accept 3 May, the alternative is Tuesday 15 May in Westminster Hall for 90 minutes. Would that be acceptable?

Jim Shannon: In the circumstances, yes, that is okay. If 15 May is all that is available, I will settle for that. I am very agreeable today.

Q12 **Chair:** But you can't do six hours on 3 May?

Jim Shannon: It would be a challenge.

Q13 **Chair:** As you will understand, Jim, on 3 May there is a comprehensive list of local government elections across England.

Jim Shannon: Well, I would not be involved, but others here might be, I know.

Q14 **Chair:** We anticipate quite a number of Members of Parliament being back on their patch that afternoon.

Jim Shannon: I have been informed by a number of Members that they would not be available for that purpose. It would not affect us in Northern Ireland, of course, but although I would be more than happy to speak for a number of hours, I am sure that the Speaker or Madam or Mr Deputy Speaker would say, "No, definitely not,"—with every right as well.

Chair: Thank you very much. You have kept your season ticket valid—that's all right. That concludes the open session of this afternoon's Committee.

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