



The Speaker

Speaker's House Houses of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Wednesday, 22nd November 2023

Dear Karen,

You will be aware that, in the Chamber on Monday 13 November 2023, I made it clear that it will be very important that the House should be able to hold to account effectively the new Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon David Cameron. The fact that a very senior minister is based in the Lords must not mean that this House is stymied in its ability to scrutinise the Government's foreign policy, especially at this very sensitive and critical time.

There are of course precedents for senior ministers to be based in the Lords and I am aware of the work your predecessor Committee undertook in 2010 concerning scrutiny of such ministers. The Foreign Secretary has already committed to me that he will appear in front of the Foreign Affairs Committee. However, as you know, the previous Procedure Committee recommended an experiment to last for one Parliamentary Session, in which departmental Secretaries of State in the Lords would be held to account by means of two question times held in Westminster Hall, supplementing the usual departmental question times held in the Chamber. However, I am not persuaded that two question times each session, held outside the main Chamber, amounts to the kind of timely, searching and effective scrutiny of the Government's approach to fast-moving global events our constituents would expect.

To that end, I would be very grateful if your Committee could undertake a short inquiry, examining the options for enhanced scrutiny by this House of senior ministers based in the Lords. In the last few years we have demonstrated that the House can adapt procedure to deal with pressing circumstances. In earlier times non-Members were on occasion part of Commons proceedings and it would be helpful to the House if you could consider, for example, whether the practice of witnesses being questioned at the bar of the House might be a model that could be adapted for current circumstances. It would also be helpful if you could



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consider whether opportunities for scrutiny should extend beyond departmental questions to statements, urgent questions or perhaps even participation in debates.

You will be aware that I have also asked the Government to set out its views about how scrutiny of the new Foreign Secretary will be undertaken, and I am sure you will want to take those into account also.

I am aware that your Committee is already looking into a number of important issues and but I believe the whole House would benefit from the careful consideration you and your colleagues would bring to this important issue. As you know, any decision about any innovative form of scrutiny will ultimately be for the House, rather than for me.

Yours Sincerely,

Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP
Speaker

Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP
Chair, Procedure Committee
House of Commons