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Commons Chamber

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House of Commons

Wednesday 13 July 2016

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

Prayers

[Mr Speaker *in the Chair*]

Business before Questions

Sessional Returns

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House Returns for Session 2015-16 of information and statistics relating to:

- (1) Business of the House
- (2) Closure of Debate, Proposal of Question and Allocation of Time (including Programme Motions)
- (3) Sittings of the House
- (4) Private Bills and Private Business
- (5) Public Bills
- (6) Delegated Legislation and Legislative Reform Orders
- (7) European Legislation, etc
- (8) Grand Committees
- (9) Panel of Chairs
- (10) Select Committees.—(*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

Wales

The Secretary of State was asked—

Rail Links: Wales and the South-west

Neil Carmichael >

(Stroud) (Con)

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1. What assessment the Government have made of the adequacy of rail links between Wales and the south-west. (Unique identification number 905783 (Unique identification number))

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales >

(Guto Bebb)

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It is a pleasure to observe the House's increased interest in Welsh questions today.

The Government are investing a record amount in the United Kingdom's railways. The new fleet of inter-city express trains which will be introduced next year on the south Wales and Great Western main lines will significantly enhance the travel experiences of passengers in Wales and the south-west.

Neil Carmichael >

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The money that has been invested so far has made a real difference to our national transport infrastructure, but does the Minister agree that it is important to ensure that we have the right stations in the right places, so that more and more passengers can have access to trains?

Guto Bebb >

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I could not agree more with my hon. Friend, who is well known for his campaigning efforts on behalf of rail commuters. The Government's investment in the railway infrastructure is at record levels. We are seeing the electrification of the main railway line to Swansea, and we are also seeing great investment in signalling in north Wales. That new capacity will be good for the economy of south Wales and the south-west.

Geraint Davies >

(Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)

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As the Minister will know, there is more economic connectivity between south Wales and the south-west than there is between south Wales and north Wales. Will he undertake to speed up the electrification of the railways, particularly at a time when Brexit is leading to considerable uncertainty about inward investment in Wales?

Guto Bebb >

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The hon. Gentleman has made a good point about the importance of rail connectivity to economic development, but I do not think it is a case of either/or. I think it is important to have great connections between north and south Wales, but we should also recognise the need for south Wales to be linked with the London area and the south-west, and the same applies to north Wales. As for "speeding up", I will take no lessons from the Labour party, which failed to invest a single penny in the electrification of any railway line in Wales during a 13-year period.

Craig Williams >

(Cardiff North) (Con)



By stark contrast with what was done by the last Government, what this Government are doing for the Great Western line—the electrification, and the new trains—is remarkable. Will the Minister meet me to discuss the provision of direct trains from Cardiff Central station to London to build on that capacity and investment?

Guto Bebb >



My hon. Friend is a great champion of railway connections between south Wales and London, and it would be a pleasure to meet him to discuss further developments in a Welsh context. I fully agree that the modernisation and electrification of the south Wales main line will greatly enhance the connectivity between south Wales and London, not least the new link to Heathrow airport.

Kevin Brennan >

(Cardiff West) (Lab)



Improving Cardiff Central station is a vital part of all this. Will the Minister update the House on what recent discussions the Government have had with Cardiff council and others about the modernisation and upgrading of the station?

Guto Bebb >



I can confirm that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has met council leaders in Cardiff to discuss the redevelopment of Cardiff Central station. The Government have already invested in enhanced capacity in the form of additional platforms, but the process needs to continue. We recognise the importance of the station to the economy of not just the capital city but the wider economic area that surrounds it, and talks are ongoing.

Nick Smith >

(Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)



Plans for future south Wales rail links were heavily dependent on EU cash. Will the Minister ask the Treasury to support rail links such as the metro for the future?

Guto Bebb >



The south Wales metro links will clearly be important to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but it should be borne in mind that the amount invested in the Cardiff capital region city deal is £1.2 billion, of which less than 8% is currently earmarked as EU funding, and that the Government have already committed £500 million to that development. I think the hon. Gentleman should be talking up the prospects for the economy of south Wales, rather than highlighting the deficiencies that he sees in the current funding arrangements.

EU Referendum: Political Consequences

Mr David Jones >

(Clwyd West) (Con)



2. What assessment he has made of the potential consequences for Wales of the outcome of the EU referendum. (Unique identification number 905784 (Unique identification number))

Christina Rees >

(Neath) (Lab)

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4. What assessment he has made of the economic effect on Wales of UK membership of the EU. (Unique identification number 905786 (Unique identification number))

The Secretary of State for Wales >

(Alun Cairns)

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The British people have voted to leave the European Union, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that their will must be respected and delivered. We are now preparing for a negotiated exit from the EU, which will involve close engagement with all the devolved Administrations to ensure that the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom are protected and advanced.

Mr Jones > [Share](#)

Structural funding for Wales is guaranteed until 2020. Given the substantial budgetary savings that will be made after British withdrawal from the EU, can my right hon. Friend confirm that his office will make every effort to ensure that the current level of funding will continue until at least that date?

Alun Cairns > [Share](#)

The Government have a strong record in guaranteeing funds for Wales, most notably the Barnett floor, which was ignored for 13 years by Labour. That demonstrates that we will work hard in prioritising the areas of the UK that rightly need and deserve support.

Christina Rees > [Share](#)

Has the Minister had talks with major employers in Wales such as Ford, Airbus, GE, Toyota and Tata to find out what their investment intentions are following the vote to leave the EU?

Alun Cairns > [Share](#)

The hon. Lady raises an important question. Within a week of the Brexit referendum I met a number of business leaders in Cardiff and last week I met a number of business leaders in north Wales. I was struck by their pragmatism and approach—the positivity they were showing. One of the most positive quotes was that entrepreneurs “thrive on change.” They recognise that we are not turning our backs on Europe, but opening up new markets across the globe.

David T. C. Davies >

(Monmouth) (Con)

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Does the Secretary of State agree that every single Government Minister who has spoken on this issue has expressed their desire to ensure spending remains at exactly the same levels in Wales as it always has done, and that that shows this Government's commitment to the people of Wales?

Alun Cairns > [Share](#)

My hon. Friend makes an important point and allows me to underline once again the positive financial commitments this Government have made to Wales. In addition to the 115% funding for the Barnett floor that we have introduced, there is a £2.8 billion investment in electrification and £500 million for a city deal, on top of a range of other projects—UK taxpayers' money being invested in Wales on top of the Barnett consequential.

Nia Griffith >

(Llanelli) (Lab)

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Given that Wales will no longer receive funding through the European regional development fund, which is allocated on objective needs-based criteria, and that Holtham saw the Barnett floor as a temporary transition measure, what consideration is the Secretary of State giving to developing a clearly needs-based formula for allocating funding to Wales?

Alun Cairns >

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There were many campaigns for a Barnett floor but it was only this Government who delivered on that. On European funds, we have not yet concluded our negotiating position, but simply replacing what are currently EU funds with another source from Westminster misses the point: the EU referendum sent out a number of messages, and those areas that receive most EU funds were the areas, sadly, that voted most strongly to leave the EU. We need to look at models of regional aid in a different way.

Hywel Williams >

(Arfon) (PC)

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The debate on our future in the EU was very badly informed. Will the Secretary of State convene an independent inquiry to identify, quantify and publish the losses, and indeed any benefits, to Wales from leaving the EU and the steps he can take, within his powers, to safeguard our national interest?

Alun Cairns >

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A European Union unit is being set up in Whitehall, which will consider all the implications for my right hon. Friend the next Prime Minister in order to form judgments and direct Government policy, but we must recognise that if any country can make a success of leaving the EU it is the United Kingdom, with its proud history as a global trading nation.

Hywel Williams >

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I did ask about the Secretary of State's Department. Anyway, I am concerned about the loss of common agricultural policy and convergence funding, and of research moneys to universities, and about the lost opportunities for young people to live, work and study abroad. But also, being Welsh and European, I feel the closing of our horizons towards a parochial little Britainism. What more can he do to ensure the future of our Welsh cultural London bypass to the rest of our continent?

Alun Cairns >

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I am disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's question. He will understand that I have a close working relationship with the Welsh Government and with the First Minister in particular. What is in Wales's interest is in the United Kingdom's interest, and I am determined to do everything possible to maintain that positive relationship as we negotiate to leave the European Union.

Paul Flynn >

(Newport West) (Lab)

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The Secretary of State's answers have been predictably vacuous and ambiguous. I want to give him a chance to boost his promotion hopes today by flouting all parliamentary traditions and giving a straight answer. Brexit is perilous to Wales, especially to the steel industry. There will be an immediate loss of £600 million, and there could be further losses later. The simple question—a one-word answer will do—is this: will he guarantee that under Brexit Wales will not lose any of the funding that it has now?

Alun Cairns >[Share](#)

I can guarantee that Wales will get its fair share, through the Barnett floor and all the other means that I have highlighted. My party can give certainty of leadership with a strong visionary negotiating stance as we approach our departure from the European Union. It is quite obvious that we cannot have that certainty of leadership from the Labour party.

Rebalancing the Economy

Karen Lumley >

(Redditch) (Con)

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3. What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of steps taken to rebalance the economy in Wales. (Unique identification number 905785 (Unique identification number))

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales >

(Guto Bebb)

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This Government are taking unprecedented steps to ensure greater and fairer prosperity right across the UK, and the UK Government's cities and local growth agenda is revolutionising the way in which we achieve this. The signing of the Cardiff capital region city deal, alongside ongoing negotiations in Swansea and early discussions for a north Wales growth deal, is a clear demonstration of our commitment to rebalancing the economy in Wales.

Karen Lumley >[Share](#)

Does my hon. Friend agree that, in my old home area of north Wales, good transport links are vital to rebalancing the economy? What plans does he have to achieve that in order to attract more investment?

Guto Bebb >[Share](#)

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the importance of transport links for economic growth in north Wales. Last Thursday, I was at a summit in north Wales with the Welsh Government economic Minister and local government leaders. We discussed a proposal for improving rail and road links in north Wales as part of the north Wales growth deal.

Nick Thomas-Symonds >

(Torfaen) (Lab)

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Central to rebalancing the Welsh economy are the metro projects and the city regions. Given that during the referendum campaign 13 Government Ministers signed a letter guaranteeing the continuation of EU funding, will the Minister ensure that none of those projects loses out as a result of our leaving the EU?

Guto Bebb > [Share](#)

I think the hon. Gentleman is asking me to give a guarantee in relation to a future Government. That Government will be established by the new Prime Minister from this afternoon onwards. The key point is that the city deal was an initiative that showed the co-operation between the Westminster Government and the Welsh Government. It showed what could be done when Governments work together. The proposed investment in the south Wales metro is something that was not delivered by the previous Government during the 13-year period in which they could have made a difference.

Antoinette Sandbach >

(Eddisbury) (Con)

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Given the opportunities of the north Wales growth deal for my constituency and for north-east Wales, what steps is the Minister taking to follow the lead of the Treasury to ensure that women business leaders are fully engaged in the north Wales growth deal?

Guto Bebb > [Share](#)

The meetings that we are having in north Wales have been with council leaders, further education leaders and leaders of Welsh businesses, and I am glad to say that they have involved both male and female leaders. The key point is that our approach in north Wales is inclusive and supported by all stakeholders. People realise the potential of north Wales joining the northern powerhouse for the benefit of all the residents of north Wales.

Jonathan Edwards >

(Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC)

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Exports are central to any rebalancing strategy. Unlike the British state, which has a gigantic trade deficit, Wales has a significant trade surplus. It is the best performing component of the UK. What assessment has the Minister made of the number of countries across the world to which Welsh companies export, and the number of trade deals that will therefore have to be renegotiated? Does he not realise that tariff-free access to the single market is vital to the Welsh economy and that—

Mr Speaker > [Share](#)

Order. We are grateful to the hon. Gentleman. We have got his drift.

Guto Bebb > [Share](#)

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his passionate question. I agree with him that access to the market is important for the Welsh economy, but he should also recognise that the growth in Welsh exports has been faster to countries outside the European Union. We need a balanced approach and to ensure that we have access to markets throughout the world, so that Welsh manufacturing businesses, such as Airbus, can carry on with their recent success.

EU Referendum: Regeneration Projects

Gerald Jones >

(Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)

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5. What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the outcome of the EU referendum on regeneration projects in Wales.
(Unique identification number 905787 (Unique identification number))

The Secretary of State for Wales >

(Alun Cairns)

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As Secretary of State I am determined to maintain our recent economic success and to ensure that we manage our transition to the new arrangements in a calm and measured way. As we negotiate our way out of the EU, a whole range of decisions will have to be made in due course.

Gerald Jones >[Share](#)

The A465—the heads of the valleys road—runs through my constituency and has historically had a bad safety record—
[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker >[Share](#)

Order. I think the people of Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney at the very least will want to hear the hon. Gentleman.

Gerald Jones >[Share](#)

Thank you, Mr Speaker. With EU funds, the road has been mostly turned into a dual carriageway, but some phases of the work have yet to start. Will the Secretary of State assure me that he will do all that he can and work with the Welsh Government to provide support and ensure that that project and many like it will not be jeopardised by Brexit?

Alun Cairns >[Share](#)

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I underline that we remain full, active members of the EU, with all the benefits and obligations that that brings, for at least two years. The project he highlights is one of the more successful EU-funded projects, but not all of them were as successful but had questionable strategies and woolly outcomes. We need to reassess how we support regional aid programmes.

Susan Elan Jones >

(Clwyd South) (Lab)

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Can the shadow Secretary of State—sorry, I mean the Secretary of State, who is just a shadow in his own party—give an absolute commitment that no regeneration projects will lose out as a result of the disastrous Brexit result?

Alun Cairns >[Share](#)

I can guarantee that for the next two years at least no EU-supported project will lose out. We have of course not yet concluded our negotiating position, and simply replacing one source of funding with another misses the point. The EU referendum sent out a clear message from the communities that are purported to benefit the most from European aid that they simply did not want what was being offered to them.

Tidal Lagoons

Neil Parish >

(Tiverton and Honiton) (Con)

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6. What assessment the Government have made of the potential contribution of tidal lagoons to energy production in Wales. (Unique identification number 905788 (Unique identification number))

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales >

(Guto Bebb)

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Tidal lagoons have the potential to make a significant contribution to the UK energy mix, and exciting projects in Wales such as the Swansea bay lagoon deserve serious consideration. That is why we have commissioned an independent review of tidal lagoons, and I look forward to reading its findings in the autumn.

Neil Parish > [Share](#)

The Bristol channel has the second highest tidal rise and fall in the world. We need to harness that power and we can pay for it over a longer period because it will create power for hundreds of years to come.

Guto Bebb > [Share](#)

I thank my hon. Friend for his passionate remarks. He is right that that potential exists, and that is why we have commissioned an independent review that will report in the autumn. It needs to look carefully at the costs and benefits of a potential tidal lagoon. We are supportive of the concept, but we have to ensure that we balance the development against the cost to the UK taxpayer.

Chris Evans >

(Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)

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As the Minister will know, many renewable energy projects depend on EU funding—[Hon. Members: “Hear, hear!”] Mr Speaker, I did not know I was that popular! Such projects include the Swansea bay tidal lagoon. Will the Minister provide a cast-iron guarantee that the UK Government will meet that funding if it is lost as we exit the EU?

Guto Bebb > [Share](#)

I can assure the hon. Gentleman that he is not that popular.

The complex tidal lagoon issue is being considered—we are looking at all the issues. I am not aware of any EU funding that was committed to the tidal lagoon project, so I can offer no guarantees.

Carolyn Harris >

(Swansea East) (Lab)

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The Hendry review team has met representatives of business and civic society right across Wales. The tidal lagoon infrastructure project is a massive economic opportunity for Wales and my constituency in particular. Will the Minister assure the House that he will emphasise to the Hendry review how much support and enthusiasm there is for this project, and how important it is that this vital

scheme is completed as a matter of urgency?

Guto Bebb >

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I welcome the hon. Lady to her place on the Front Bench. I fully accept the comments made about support for the concept in the Swansea area, and I can confirm that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already met Charles Hendry to discuss the project. It is not my position to prejudge an independent report, but I assure her that the views of the residents and local authorities in south Wales are known to Charles Hendry.

Farming Sector

Glyn Davies >

(Montgomeryshire) (Con)

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7. What recent assessment he has made of the contribution of the farming sector to the economy in Wales. (Unique identification number 905789 (Unique identification number))

Caroline Nokes >

(Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)

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11. What recent assessment he has made of the contribution of the farming sector to the economy in Wales. (Unique identification number 905794 (Unique identification number))

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales >

(Guto Bebb)

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The farming sector is the economic backbone of the Welsh rural economy. The total income from farming in Wales is estimated at more than £175 million, but more important is the contribution that Welsh agriculture makes to our rural communities. It is crucial and this Government will continue to support it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker >

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Order. The voice of Montgomeryshire must be heard.

Glyn Davies >

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Does the Minister share my concerns and those of the Welsh farming unions about the administration of the single farm payment scheme in Wales, particularly in relation to cross-border issues? Will he agree to meet the farming unions at the Royal Welsh show next week to discuss this serious issue?

Guto Bebb >

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I agree completely with my hon. Friend that any delays in payments to the farming community are problematic. This issue is devolved to the Welsh Government and it is one I have already discussed with farming unions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be at the Royal Welsh next week, subject to the decisions of the next Prime Minister, and meetings have been arranged with farming unions at that event, which is undoubtedly the premier farming event of the whole United Kingdom.

Caroline Nokes >[Share](#)

Welsh, and indeed British, farmers are responsible for producing some of the finest food in the world. Now that we are to leave the EU, what effort is my hon. Friend making to make sure that the Department ensures that all of the UK's fantastic home-grown produce is promoted to international markets?

Guto Bebb >[Share](#)

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the quality of food produced in Wales is second to none. We produce the best lamb in the entire world, and the contribution of such produce to the economy is crucial. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have already met business leaders, including food producers, to give them confidence that they can still access international markets following the EU referendum result.

Mr Mark Williams >

(Ceredigion) (LD)

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The Royal Welsh show next week in Builth Wells will indeed show the very best of Welsh agriculture. When the Secretary of State goes there, he will get the same question that I have received in the past few weeks, since 23 June: what guarantees are there that the support for the family farm at its current level will remain in the future to sustain the essential rural economy, in west Wales and more generally?

Guto Bebb >[Share](#)

The hon. Gentleman is a champion of the agricultural sector—there is no doubt about that. I can assure him, once again, that the Wales Office has already had meetings with the farming unions. We can certainly offer the guarantee that the current funding arrangements will be in place until at least 2018, but the ongoing support for Welsh farming will be subject to agreements involving this Government, the way in which we exit the European Union and the decisions taken by the future Prime Minister.

Liz Saville Roberts >

(Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)

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Given that the common agricultural policy and rural development programme contribute hundreds of millions of pounds to the Welsh rural economy, what UK exit scenario could possibly best serve Wales?

Guto Bebb >[Share](#)

As the hon. Lady knows, I argued for Wales and the UK to stay within the EU, but the reality is that Wales voted to leave. It is therefore crucial that we support the industries that are dependent on exporting to the EU. We have a quality product offered by Welsh agriculture, so it is imperative that we talk up that market and support the sector to the best of our abilities. Again, I give assurance to the farming unions that the current funding situation is in place until 2018.

Ian C. Lucas >

(Wrexham) (Lab)

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Does the Minister agree that leaving the European Union offers a golden opportunity to assess the level of subsidy paid to farming in Wales to see whether that money can be more effectively and efficiently spent in other areas?

Guto Bebb >

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We need to look at the way in which Government spend money. If there is to be a funding mechanism in the future for Welsh agriculture, it must be looked at in the totality of Government spending. However, it is pretty important to state that more than 60,000 jobs in Wales are dependent on the agriculture sector, and it would be short-sighted in the extreme for any Government to turn their back on a sector that puts Wales on the international map.

Prime Minister

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Danny Kinahan >
(South Antrim) (UUP)

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Q1. If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 13 July. (Unique identification number 905833 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >
(Mr David Cameron)

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I know that the whole House will join me in congratulating Andy Murray, Heather Watson, Jordanne Whiley, Gordon Reid and Alfie Hewett on their stunning success at Wimbledon.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. Other than one meeting this afternoon with Her Majesty the Queen, the diary for the rest of my day is remarkably light.

Danny Kinahan >

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May I echo the Prime Minister’s congratulations to Andrew Murray and all the other winners? We thank the Prime Minister for all his hard work and his leadership—[Hon. Members: “Hear, hear”!]
—particularly his commitment to the Union and to Northern Ireland, visiting it often and swimming in Lough Erne. Perhaps he would like to come and swim in Lough Neagh. The Ulster Unionist party looks forward to working with the next Prime Minister. I am told that there are lots of leadership roles out there at the moment—there is the England football team and “Top Gear”. Even across the Big Pond, there is a role that needs filling. I will if I may go into my pet subject.

Stephen Pound >
(Ealing North) (Lab)

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In your own time, Danny.

Danny Kinahan >

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Thank you.

Brexit really threatens the Union. Will the Prime Minister work with his successors to ensure that we have somebody that will pull together all the countries of the Union and the overseas territories so that we can all work and thrive together?

The Prime Minister > [Share](#)

Let me thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks and fascinating suggestions for future jobs, most of which sound even harder than this one, so I think I'll pass. I believe that Northern Ireland is stronger than it was six years ago—58,000 more people in work, the full devolution of justice and home affairs delivered under this Government, the Saville report published, record inward investment and the creation of new jobs. Like him, I care passionately about our United Kingdom, as do all of us in this House. We need to make sure that, as we leave the European Union, we work out how to keep the benefits of the common travel area. Hard work is being done now with civil servants in Northern Ireland, Whitehall and the Republic of Ireland, and the pace of that work needs to quicken.

Jack Lopresti >

(Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)

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Q4. I, too, pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for all the hard work that he has done leading this great country for the past few years. My right hon. Friend's lasting legacy will include supporting the Kurds whose peshmerga are bravely fighting Daesh in all our interests. Having visited the peshmerga on the frontline, I know that our airstrikes, weapons and training are crucial, but peshmerga injuries could be reduced with additional equipment such as body armour, respirators and front-line medical facilities, and we possibly could provide some beds in our specialist hospital in Birmingham to the most seriously injured. Does he agree that that is a relatively small investment that would make a huge difference to our allies in our common fight to defeat the evil of terrorism? (Unique identification number 905836 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister > [Share](#)

First, I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. He is absolutely right that the Kurds are incredibly brave fighters and are doing valuable work against Daesh in Iraq and Syria. I will look carefully at his suggestion of using the Birmingham hospital. The Queen Elizabeth Hospital has excellent facilities for battlefield casualties. Our Army is already providing medical instruction to the peshmerga to help them deal with the situation, but we will look to see whether more can be done. Let us be frank, the strategy is working. Daesh is on the back foot: it has lost 45% of the territory that it once held in Iraq; its finances have been hit; more than 25,000 Daesh fighters have now been killed; desertion has increased; and the flow of foreign fighters has fallen by 90%. I have always said that this will take a long time to work in Iraq and Syria, but we must stick at it and we must stay the course.

Jeremy Corbyn >

(Islington North) (Lab)

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May I start by joining the Prime Minister in paying tribute to the British winners at Wimbledon—Andy Murray, Heather Watson, Jordanne Whaley, Alfie Hewett and Gordon Reid? Also, I think it would be nice if we congratulated Serena Williams on her fantastic achievement.

It is only right that after his six years as Prime Minister, we thank the right hon. Gentleman for his service. I have often disagreed with him, but some of his achievements I welcome and want to recognise today. One is helping to secure the release of Shaker Aamer from Guantanamo Bay; another is legislating to achieve equal marriage in our society. I am sure he would like to acknowledge that it was Labour votes that helped him to get the legislation through. Will he express some concern at the way that homelessness has risen in this country for the past six years and looks like it is going to continue to rise?

The Prime Minister > [Share](#)

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. I join him in paying tribute to Serena Williams, who has now overtaken Steffi Graf's amazing record of 22 grand slams.

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for what he said about Shaker Aamer. That was a case that this Government raised again and again with the US Government, and we are pleased that it has been resolved. I thank him also for what he said about equal marriage. There are 30,000 gay people in our country who, in the past six years, have been able to get married. That is real progress. I will never forget the day at No. 10 when one of the people who works very close to the front door said to me, “I’m not that interested in politics, Mr Cameron, but because of something your lot have done, I am able to marry the person I’ve loved all my life this weekend.” There are many amazing moments in this job, but that was one of my favourites.

As for homelessness, it is still 10% below the peak that we saw under Labour, but the key is building more homes. We have built 700,000 homes since I became Prime Minister, but now we need to quicken the pace of that. The key to building more homes is, yes, programmes such as Help to Buy; yes, the reforms to the planning system, but the absolute key is a strong economy.

Jeremy Corbyn >

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I have been listening carefully to what the Home Secretary has been saying over the past few days. She said:

“It’s harder than ever for young people to buy their first house.”

Does the Prime Minister think that is because of record low house building or his Government’s apparent belief that £450,000 is an affordable price for a starter home?

The Prime Minister >

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First, let me say at the Dispatch Box how warmly I congratulate the Home Secretary on becoming leader of the Conservative party. When it comes to women Prime Ministers, I am very pleased to be able to say that pretty soon it is going to be 2:0, and not a pink bus in sight.

On the issue of housing and homelessness, as I said, 700,000 homes have been delivered. The right hon. Gentleman asked about affordability, which is key. When I became Prime Minister, because of what had happened to the mortgage market, a first-time buyer often needed to have as much as £30,000 to put down a deposit. Because of the combination of Help to Buy and shared ownership, some people are able to get on the housing ladder now with a deposit of as little as £2,000. With the low mortgage rates and the new houses we are building, we are making good progress.

Jeremy Corbyn >

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The malaise seems a little deeper still. The Home Secretary said, talking of the economy,

“so that it really does work for everyone. Because it is apparent to anybody who is in touch with the real world that people do not feel our economy works that way”.

Is she not right that too many people in too many places in Britain feel that the economy has been destroyed in their towns because the industries have gone, there are high levels of unemployment or under-employment, and a deep sense of malaise? Do not we all need to address that?

The Prime Minister >

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If we are going to talk about the economic record, let us get the facts straight. We have cut the deficit by two thirds. There are 2.5 million more people in work in our country. There are almost a million more businesses, and 2.9 million people in apprenticeships have been trained under this Government. When it comes to poverty, 300,000 fewer people are in relative poverty and 100,000 fewer children are in relative poverty. If I am accused of sloth in delivery by the right hon. Gentleman, let us take the past week. We have both been having leadership elections. We got on with it. We have had resignation, nomination, competition and coronation. The Opposition have not even decided what the rules are yet. If they ever got into power, it would take them about a year to work out who would sit where.

Jeremy Corbyn >[Share](#)

Democracy is an exciting and splendid thing, and I am enjoying every moment of it.

Talking of the economy, the Home Secretary said that many people

“find themselves exploited by unscrupulous bosses”—

I cannot imagine who she was referring to. In his hand-over discussions with the Home Secretary, could the Prime Minister enlighten us as to whether there is any proposal to take on agency Britain by banning zero-hours contracts, clamping down on umbrella companies, repealing the Trade Union Act 2016 or, preferably, all three?

The Prime Minister >[Share](#)

The right hon. Gentleman is right that democracy is a splendid thing—I have to agree with him about that. Let me answer very directly on exploitation in the workplace. It is this Government that, for the first time, has introduced a national living wage—that is a huge change. It is this Government that has massively increased the power of the Gangmasters Licensing Authority. There are record fines for businesses that do not pay the minimum wage, and there is much more policing and many more prosecutions taking place. All of those things have changed under this Government. As for zero-hours contracts, they account for fewer than one in 40 people in work. Some 60% of people on zero-hours contracts do not want to work more hours. It was this Government that did something the Labour party never did, which was to ban exclusive zero-hours contracts—13 years of Labour, but it took a coalition Conservative Government to do it.

Let me say something to the right hon. Gentleman about the democratic process of leadership elections, because I did say a couple of weeks ago—*[Interruption.]* I have to say that I am beginning to admire his tenacity. He is reminding me of the Black Knight in “Monty Python and the Holy Grail”. He has been kicked so many times, but he says, “Keep going, it’s only a flesh wound.” I admire that.

Jeremy Corbyn >[Share](#)

I would like the Prime Minister to address another issue that the House voted on last week. I have a question from Nina—*[Interruption.]* It is a question from somebody who deserves an answer. She says:

“I would like to know, if there is any possibility, that an EU citizen, that has lived in the UK for thirty years can have their right of permanent residence... revoked and deported, depending on the Brexit negotiations”.

There has been no clear answer to this question. It is one that worries a very large number of people, and it would be good if, in his last Question Time, the Prime Minister could at least offer some assurance to those people.

The Prime Minister >[Share](#)

Let me reassure Nina that there is absolutely no chance of that happening to someone in those circumstances. We are working hard to do what we want, which is to give a guarantee to EU citizens that they will have their rights respected—all those who have come to this country. The only circumstance in which I could ever envisage a future Government trying to undo that guarantee would be if British citizens in other European countries did not have their rights respected. I think it is important to have reciprocity. The new Prime Minister will be working to give that guarantee as fast as we can.

I am glad the right hon. Gentleman mentions emails, because, actually, I have an email as well. I got this—I am not making this up, I promise—on 16 September 2015 from someone called Judith, and she said this:

“Please, please keep dignity, and not triumphalism during the first PMQs today with Jeremy Corbyn.”

She gave this reason:

“Tom Watson, who may oust Jeremy Corbyn...is a very different kettle of fish. He is experienced, organised and far more dangerous in the long run.”

She goes on:

“Sensible, sober, polite answers to Mr Corbyn...let him create his own party disunity.”

After this is over, I have got to find Judith and find out what on earth happens next.

Jeremy Corbyn >

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I have had the pleasure of asking the Prime Minister 179 questions—[Hon. Members: “More!”] Thank you. There are plenty more to come to his successor—don’t worry about that.

Before I ask the Prime Minister my last question, could I just put on record that I wish him well as he leaves office? I also wish his family well—Samantha and their children. We should all recognise that while many of us really do enjoy our jobs and our political life, it is the loved ones nearest to us and our families who actually make enormous sacrifices so that we may be able to do this. I would also like him to pass on my thanks to his mum for her advice about ties, suits and songs. It is extremely kind of her, and I would be grateful if he would pass that on to her personally. I am reflecting on the lesson that she offered.

I have one rumour that I want the Prime Minister to deal with. There is a rumour going round that his departure has been carefully choreographed so that he can slip seamlessly into the vacancy on “Strictly” that was created this morning by Len Goodman’s departure. Is that his next career?

The Prime Minister >

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I do not really have a pasa doble, so I can promise that that is not the case.

Let me thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks and good wishes to my amazing wife Samantha and my lovely children, who are all watching from the Gallery today. He is absolutely right: the pressure in these jobs often bears hardest on those we love around us. Let me send my best wishes to his family as well.

I have done a bit of research, Mr Speaker. I have addressed 5,500 questions from this Dispatch Box; I will leave it for others to work out how many I have answered. Because of your belief in letting everyone have their say, I think I have done a record 92 hours of statements from this Dispatch Box, as well as some very enjoyable Liaison Committee appearances and other things.

I will certainly send the right hon. Gentleman’s best wishes back to my mother. He seems to have taken her advice and is looking absolutely splendid today.

This gives me the opportunity to put a rumour to rest, as well—it is even more serious than the “Strictly Come Dancing” one. The right hon. Gentleman will appreciate this because El Gato, his cat, is particularly famous. This is the rumour that somehow I do not love Larry; I do, and I have photographic evidence to prove it. Sadly, I cannot take Larry with me; he belongs to the house and the staff love him very much, as do I.

Mr Peter Lilley >

(Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)

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Is my right hon. Friend aware that in 33 years in this House watching five Prime Ministers and several ex-Prime Ministers, I have seen him achieve a mastery of that Dispatch Box unparalleled in my time? That is not just because of his command of detail and his wit, but because he commands the respect of friend and foe alike, who know that he is driven not just by legitimate political ambitions and ideas, but by a sense of duty that always leads him to try to make this country more prosperous, more solvent, more tolerant, more fair, and more free. He will command the respect of generations to come.

The Prime Minister >



Those words mean a lot from my right hon. Friend, who has spent so much time in this House. It is a special place. I think Prime Minister's questions, for all its theatrics, does have a purpose, because it is a time when every week the Prime Minister has to know absolutely everything that is going on in Whitehall. Often you find out things that you want to stop pretty quickly before 12 o'clock on a Wednesday. I believe that politics is about public service in the national interest, and that is what I have always tried to do.

This session does have some admirers around the world. I remember when I was doing the Leader of the Opposition's job and I met Mayor Bloomberg in New York. We walked down the street and everyone knew Mike Bloomberg. Everyone came up and said, "Mayor, you're doing a great job." No one had a clue who I was, until eventually someone said, "Hey, Cameron. Prime Minister's questions—we love your show!"

Angus Robertson >

(Moray) (SNP)



I join the Prime Minister and the leader of the Labour party in paying tribute to all the winners at Wimbledon.

This week we mark the 21st anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. As this is one of the few political causes that the Prime Minister and I both wholeheartedly support, I hope he will impress on his successor the importance of supporting the Remembering Srebrenica organisation and all the good work that it does across the UK.

Notwithstanding our differences, I genuinely extend my best personal wishes to the Prime Minister and his family; I wish them all the best. However, the Prime Minister's legacy will undoubtedly be that he has brought us to the brink of being taken out of the European Union, so we on these Benches will not be applauding his premiership. What advice has he given his successor on taking Scotland out of the EU against the wishes of Scottish voters?

The Prime Minister >



First, let me join the right hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to all those who lost their lives in Srebrenica. We should make sure that we commemorate the event properly every year. This year there will be a service in the Foreign Office, where commemoration will be given and testimony read out. We should think of it alongside the terrible events of modern history such as the holocaust. This also reminds us that while, as we often debate in this House, there is a price for intervention, there is also sometimes a price from non-intervention. We should remember that.

In terms of what the right hon. Gentleman says about Scotland, the United Kingdom and Europe, my advice to my successor, who is a brilliant negotiator, is that we should try to be as close to the European Union as we can be for the benefits of trade, co-operation and security. The channel will not get any wider once we leave the European Union, and that is the relationship we should seek. That would be good for the United Kingdom and good for Scotland.

Angus Robertson >



The Prime Minister's successor is very well known in Scotland at present—this is across all the front pages—because of the threat to deport the very much loved and liked Brain family from the highlands. The first vote of her premiership is likely to be on imposing Trident against the wishes of almost every single MP from Scotland. Meanwhile, she says that she plans to plough on with Brexit, regardless of the fact that Scotland voted to remain in the EU. How does the outgoing Prime Minister think that all that will go down in Scotland?

The Prime Minister >



First of all, specifically on the Brain family, Mrs Brain came to this country on a tier 4 student visa to study for a Scottish history degree. She completed it and her husband and son came as dependants. We have given them an extension until 1 August to put in an application for a work visa in the normal way, and I very much hope that will happen.

On Trident, there will be a vote in this House. It is right that this House should decide. Actually, many people in Scotland support our nuclear deterrent, maintaining it and the jobs that come in Scotland.

The right hon. Gentleman asks about the record of this Government when it comes to Scotland. I will tell him what it is: 143,000 more people in work in Scotland; massive investment in the renewable industries in Scotland; the two biggest warships in our history built in Scotland; a powerhouse Parliament; a referendum that was legal, decisive and fair; and, I might add, a Scotsman winning Wimbledon twice while I was Prime Minister. Never mind Indy 2; I think it is time for Andy 2.

Jo Churchill >

(Bury St Edmunds) (Con)

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Q7. I thank the Prime Minister for the leadership he has shown, particularly in his support of women in the Conservative party. The Prime Minister's legacy for me, however, and for fellow cancer survivors, is the personal support that he has shown for the cancer drugs fund. Today I ask him to show the same support for those who have been affected by contaminated blood. Will he please update the House as to whether they, too, will have a legacy? (Unique identification number 905839 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >

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I thank my hon. Friend for what she says about the cancer drugs fund, which has helped many people and families in our country. She is absolutely right to raise the issue of contaminated blood, and I can today announce that we will spend the extra £125 million that we have identified. A much fairer and more comprehensive scheme will guarantee that all those infected will, for the first time, receive a regular annual payment. That will include all those with hepatitis stage 1, who will now receive £3,500 per year, rising to £4,500 per year by the end of the Parliament. For those with hepatitis C at stage 2 or HIV, or who are co-infected with both, annual payments will increase over the lifetime of the Parliament, and we will enhance the support for those who have been bereaved and those who will be in future, significantly boosting the money for the discretionary payments. Last year I apologised to the victims on behalf of the British Government for something that should never have happened. Today I am proud to provide them with the support that they deserve.

Although it is not right to pick out two individuals, I think that people should know that they can come to constituency surgeries, make their point to their Member of Parliament and campaign, as these sufferers have done. In my case, **GRO-A** and Matthew Davies repeatedly came to my surgery, saying, "This mustn't stand. More must be done." I know that not everyone will be fully satisfied with what is being done, but it does show our democracy working and compassion in replying to this terrible problem.

Jeff Smith >

(Manchester, Withington) (Lab)

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Q2. The Prime Minister came to office promising to keep the UK's triple A rating, to end top-down NHS reorganisations and to stop his party banging on about Europe. How would he say that has gone? (Unique identification number 905834 (Unique identification number))

The Prime Minister >

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On the economic record, 2.5 million more jobs, the deficit cut by two thirds, 2.9 million apprenticeships, a million more businesses, and a growth rate that has been at the top of the developed world are all because of the choices that we made. Because we did that, we have been able to back our NHS with a 10% funding increase, which is more than £10 billion in real terms in this Parliament. As for Europe, we have to settle these issues. It is right that, when trying to settle a really big constitutional issue, you not just rely on Parliament, but ask the people as well. We made a promise and we kept a promise.