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Topical Questions

Volume 666: debated on Wednesday 23 October 2019

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Carol Monaghan >

(Glasgow North West) (SNP)

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T1. If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities. (900100 (Unique identification number))

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster >

(Michael Gove)

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It is my responsibility to prepare this country for Brexit. I am delighted that so many democrats across the House voted for the Second Reading of the withdrawal agreement Bill last night, and the universal cry from across this country is: please, get Brexit done.

Carol Monaghan >

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It depends on which nation of this country we are talking about. At a recent meeting of the Scottish Parliament's Finance and Constitution Committee, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster confirmed that, as part of his Government's deal, Northern Irish businesses would have easier access to the European single market than Scottish businesses. Can he confirm how much this clear competitive disadvantage will cost Scottish business?

Michael Gove >

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Scotland's businesses benefit from being part of our United Kingdom. I gently remind the hon. Lady, as the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General pointed out earlier, that more Scots voted to leave the European Union than voted for the Scottish nationalist party at the last general election.

Peter Aldous >

(Waveney) (Con)

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T4. With the Government being the largest client of the construction industry, will the Minister support a private Member's Bill—similar to the ten-minute rule Bill that I introduced in the last Session—to outlaw the abuse of retentions? (900103 (Unique identification number))

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office >

(Simon Hart)

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I know how much work my hon. Friend has put into that issue. The Government have consulted on ways to prevent the loss of retention payments due to abuse or supplier insolvency. We continue to work with the industry and its clients to develop measures that will achieve that aim, and I very much hope that he will help us in that process.

Dr Philippa Whitford >

(Central Ayrshire) (SNP)

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T2. One hundred and eighty-one victims have died since the start of the contaminated **blood** inquiry, so when will this Government accept the responsibility for the worst scandal in the NHS and pay **compensation** to surviving victims and bereaved families? (900101 (Unique identification number))

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General >

(Oliver Dowden)

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The hon. Lady raises a very important point. The **infected blood** inquiry is a priority for the Government, and it is extremely important that all those who have suffered so terribly can get the answers that they have spent decades waiting for. On the point of **compensation**, the Government have always made it clear that we will wait for the determination of legal liability, to which the inquiry's deliberations relate, and then make our determination off the back of that.

Chris Green >

(Bolton West) (Con)

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T5. The Mayor of Greater Manchester is the police and crime commissioner and has responsibility for the Greater Manchester spatial framework and for health and social care devolution. London has an Assembly to challenge the Mayor. What mechanism is there in Greater Manchester? (900104 (Unique identification number))

The Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth >

(Jake Berry)

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As part of delivering our northern powerhouse, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has committed to 100% devolution across the north of England, but in Greater Manchester, power must come with responsibility. That is why last May, the people of Bolton threw off the yoke of their Labour council after 40 years. The new Conservative leader, David Greenhalgh, will end Andy Burnham's era of impunity.

Stephen Gethins >

(North East Fife) (SNP)

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T3. The withdrawal agreement will have the most profound effect on devolution, and I do not trust the Tories with devolution. Does the Minister agree with the First Ministers of Wales and Scotland, who are meeting across the road, that they must give legislative consent? (900102 (Unique identification number))

Michael Gove >

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It is very interesting to hear from the hon. Gentleman. He does not believe in devolution; he believes in smashing up our United Kingdom, so I will take no lectures from him on making our UK institutions work in the interests of all.

Mrs Pauline Latham >

(Mid Derbyshire) (Con)

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Derby is only a short train ride from London and is a welcoming city for business. Will the Minister see which Departments could be moved out of expensive accommodation in London to much better value-for-money offices in Derby?

Simon Hart >[Share](#)

I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for her reference to Derby. We recognise the strength of the east midlands, and we are working with stakeholders from her local enterprise partnership—D2N2—to explore opportunities for role relocation in this area.

Mary Glendon >

(North Tyneside) (Lab)

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T6. The Government's previous offers to reduce the pension age of prison officers have included unrelated changes to their terms and conditions, such as a derisory three-year pay deal. Will the Minister agree to sit round the table with the POA union to negotiate this issue solely on its own? (900105 (Unique identification number))

Oliver Dowden >[Share](#)

We continue to engage with the prison officers union, but I would be happy to meet any people who wish to discuss this.

Rachel Maclean >

(Redditch) (Con)

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What steps is the Minister taking to improve access to wireless internet at hospitals and in operating theatres?

Oliver Dowden >[Share](#)

The Cabinet Office works across all Departments to help drive the Government's commitments, including to ensure the roll-out of broadband across the United Kingdom, and I am working with the Department of Health and Social Care on that.

Kerry McCarthy >

(Bristol East) (Lab)

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T7. Yellowhammer identified possible food shortages and food price rises that would have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups. What work are Ministers doing with schools, hospitals and frontline charities to make sure this is not an issue? (900106 (Unique identification number))

Michael Gove >[Share](#)

I am very grateful to the hon. Lady. I know how seriously she takes these issues. Through the XO Committee, we are working with local resilience forums and with the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that vulnerable groups are protected come what may.

Amber Rudd >

(Hastings and Rye) (Ind)

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Existing electoral law seeks to control the spending and supervise the message whenever we go into elections. Does the Minister share my concern that it might not be adequate to control and supervise the advertising and campaigning that takes place on social media, where most of our constituents are more likely to get the message and where it is so important to ensure adequate controls?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office >

(Kevin Foster)

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I appreciate my right hon. Friend's concerns. We will be launching the consultation on electoral funding next year, as I have already outlined in this Session, and we are looking to introduce digital imprints so that electors are well aware of who is targeting them on social media.