

Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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1 April



Kingsmeadow School Community Radio



Atrocious weather at the beginning of March prevented me from launching Gateshead's Kingsmeadow School community radio station, but I was equally glad to be the final guest. The project has been a great way for students to learn media skills whilst having fun at the same time!

Montagu Pit Disaster remembered



Scotswood Village Residents' Association organised a service to mark the 80th anniversary of the Montagu Pit Disaster in which 38 men and boys lost their lives. Coincidentally, I recently discovered that a relative of mine died in the disaster, John Trewick. As he was about to leave for work, a boot lace snapped and he had to use a brown rather than a black lace. It was the mis-matched laces that made the identification possible. Amazingly, 200 escaped death that day. (pictured left with Margaret Cooney(Right) and Alma Wheeler from the Residents' Association)

Gateshead College - visit



Newcastle College - Beacon Status

Newcastle College goes from strength to strength! The College was one of only five throughout the UK to win, yet another, award celebrating the College's excellence and its achievements in delivering an extensive and varied curriculum to a very wide range of students. The award was presented in London by Education Minister Kim Howells MP.

I arranged a tour of the Houses of Parliament for students from Gateshead College, and met with them later to answer their many questions about current affairs and my work in Parliament.

Comment

Budget 2005 had at its core the government's primary economic objective - building a strong economy and a fair society, with opportunity and security for all. As we move forward - probably - to a General Election, it is impossible to underestimate the importance of a **strong, stable economy**. Without it, Britain will return to the **high inflation, high unemployment, high interest rates** of the 1980s and early 1990s, where mortgage rates soared to 15%, home repossessions were an everyday occurrence and unemployment hit 3 million.

Ten years ago, **75%** of public spending went on paying debt interest and the bills of unemployment. Today, because unemployment and debt have been dramatically reduced, **75% of new money goes to hospitals, schools and other frontline services**.

There was something for virtually everyone in the Budget. It helped hardworking families by increasing the child element of the **Child Tax Credit**; from 2006, **free bus travel** for disabled people and over-60s; every pensioner household paying council tax gets a **£200 rebate**; first-time buyers were helped by the raising of the starting threshold of **stamp duty**; the **inheritance tax threshold** was increased; no pensioner going into **hospital** in future will have their pension or benefits cut and Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit will be extended to the families of **unwaged 16-19** year old trainees from April 2006.

By contrast, the Tories are committed to cuts to all public services, schools and hospitals. *This election will be a stark choice between Tory cuts and Labour progress.*

Parliament

The **Prevention of Terrorism Bill** occupied considerable Parliamentary time last month - and rightly so, because of its importance. I accept the need for the powers that the Home Secretary sought - unfortunately, we live in a world where some people are committed to the overthrow of the very freedoms we cherish, and don't care how many are killed or hurt in the process - but I was uneasy about the concentration of power in political, rather than judicial, hands. The compromise offered by the government contains more judge-led control orders and clearer rules relating to consultations between Home Secretary and chief constables.

The Lords' scrutinising and revising role is accepted by all, but the progress - or lack of - of this Bill displayed the **Lords'** refusal to acknowledge the primacy of a body actually elected by the people, a comment I later made in the Chamber. I also asked the **Prime Minister** about the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (**NICE**) proposal to withdraw from the NHS certain drugs currently used to treat Alzheimer's and dementia. There is great concern about this and I was able to get an assurance from the Prime Minister that although NICE is an independent body the issue will be looked at again.

Other Bills dealt with by the Commons included the Remaining stages of the **Road Safety Bill**, the Second Reading of the **Education Bill** and the **Disability Discrimination Bill**. This latter Bill extends the definition of disability to at least another 175,000 people by also covering people diagnosed with HIV, multiple sclerosis and cancer. It closes gaps in pre-existing legislation by

extending the coverage of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to almost all activities of the public sector, and helps eliminate the institutional disadvantage that many disabled people still face.

I have attended the usual **Northern Group** and **PLP** meetings, as well as meeting with representatives from the **Showman's Guild**, **Amicus** and **NEXUS**. I also attended a reception in Downing Street marking **Commonwealth Day**, and later joined Commonwealth delegates in their conference in Westminster, including an MP from the Turks and Caicos Islands which I visited last summer (*picture below*)



Constituency

In addition to the events on the front page, I also unveiled a National Railway Heritage Award plaque awarded to **Network Rail** for their refurbishment and restoration work at Newcastle Central Station, including the Dobson barrel roofs, the Centurion Bar, portico and station clock.

