

Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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Mr Speaker Visits Kingsmeadow

I was absolutely delighted to be able to welcome Commons Speaker John Bercow to Kingsmeadow School on his first visit as Speaker to a school outside London. As well as addressing Year 10 students and enjoying a spirited Question and Answer session, he had detailed discussions with members of the School Council over lunch and later said how impressed he was with the state of the art building and facilities, recognising the huge investment ploughed in through the 'Building Schools for the Future' programme

Left with Mr Speaker and Head Teacher Barbara Rouse



Minister's Visit to Eaga

The Warm Front scheme has to be one of the government's greatest success stories. More than two million vulnerable households have been assisted since its start in 2000, keeping people healthy and warm as well as lowering fuel bills. The benefit entitlement checks and domestic energy advice has also had a positive impact upon vulnerable homes and families and a central factor driving the scheme's valuable work forwards has been the focus and commitment of Eaga in Gateshead as lead contractor.

Above, with Department of Energy and Climate Change Minister David Kidney listening to an Eaga employee discussing energy saving options with a caller



North East Grand Committee

The first ever meeting of the North East Grand Committee took place in Middlesbrough Town Hall on 25th September. This initiative by the government to get MPs



out of Parliament and engaging in debates in the regions saw 14 of the region's MPs debating the regional economy and questioning the regional minister. While no substitute for regional government it nevertheless provides a useful forum for local people to attend. The full text of my own contribution is on my website and the Parliamentary website will carry a verbatim report of the whole of the proceedings.

Above, addressing the Grand Committee

Easibathe Visit

We all want to live as long as possible - let's face it its better than the alternative! But whilst longevity is undoubtedly one of the benefits of modern life, it also often means mobility difficulties. Easibathe is a Dunston-based company that has grown dramatically in the last 5 years and specialises in providing modifications to bathrooms to maintain user freedom, dignity and independence.

Whilst they supply mainly to the local authority and care home market, they also offer advice and help to individuals with a range of equipment from simple bath seats and hoists to a complete bathroom that can be erected in any room in a house in 5 hours!

Right with MD Martin Cook inspecting some of the equipment Easibathe supplies



Comment

Pity the poor Lib Dems - already struggling to stay alive never mind surging forward, knocked off last year's front pages by the collapse of Lehman Brothers, and knocked off this year's by the UN Climate Change conference in New York and Gordon Brown's announcement about the future Trident programme. Even the closure of the camp at Sangatte was obviously still more interesting to the press than the Lib Dem conference!

By contrast, there was an intense scrutiny of Gordon Brown and the Labour Party conference, with the press apparently determined to undermine and weaken the government. And if any member thinks I'm paranoid about the media, let me cite the stories that ran as conference started about how President Obama had 'snubbed' the Prime Minister by refusing to meet with him. The story was vehemently denied, not only by Downing Street but also by the White House, but did that stop the media running with it? No, the truth simply didn't make a good story.

Clearly, the party conference season has heralded the start of the general election campaign. The massive debt that we have accrued in common with every western economy as a result of the economic down-turn and the banking catastrophe has forced all the major political parties to re-think their policies. The need to re-pay that debt will shape government policies for very many years to come. All parties agree that the debt must, and can, be repaid but the differences lie in how each party meets the challenge. Nick Clegg, who revealed at his conference that he wants to be Prime Minister when he grows up, talked of 'savage cuts' in public expenditure. While the Tories say little, but their friends in the Institute of Directors and Tax Payers' Alliance revealed much. They would cut deep and hard with Labour's 'Building Schools for the

future' programme, 'Sure Start', free bus travel and TV licences for the elderly just a few of the measures they recommend should go.

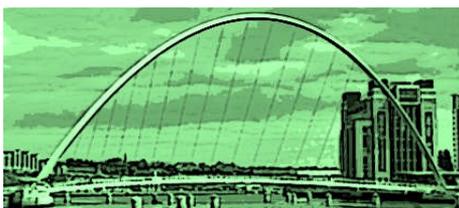
I write this report the day following Gordon Brown's speech to the **Labour Party Conference** in Brighton. Gordon too spoke of the need for restraint. However, he also spelled out the further work Labour would do in a fourth term. Free home-care for the elderly, bolstering the post office network by making it a 'People's Bank', 10 hours free nursery time for the poorest 2year olds, continued rises in the minimum wage, linking pensions to earnings. All policies that challenge the Tories and spell out Labour's values.

He spoke with confidence and with conviction and in sharp contrast to David Cameron made it quite clear where he wants to take our country and how we can get there.



Parliament

Parliament is in recess.



Constituency

Members will know that I have always made a practice of trying to attend as many **ward party meetings** as possible. Obviously, with the House of Commons sitting each week, that's only possible in September. This last month, I was able to attend 6 branch meetings but I thought it might be useful for members who weren't able to attend the meetings to know what has been discussed.

The meetings that I have attended also provided extremely useful material for my contribution at the **North East Regional Grand Committee** in Middlesbrough. This is a newly-created committee,

designed to offer a forum for open debate by MPs in their own regions with the regional ministers in attendance to answer questions. I was able to pick up on many of the comments made to me by members at the ward meetings - the region's poor transport links both in terms of road and rail, the need for more investment in housing - although members generally welcomed the announcement of new build, they felt that the housing waiting lists, both locally and nationally, warranted more intervention and members also suggested that a focus on housing could be a central platform in an election manifesto. Jobs and the economy were also themes raised at ward party meetings.

Other issues were raised too - and, as always, I'd welcome members' thoughts. For instance, I outlined the campaigns I'd been involved in - of particular interest to me personally has been my involvement with the campaign to review and improve the carers' allowance. We also discussed concerns about new proposals for welfare reform and I have raised these fears with the Minister.

Of course, we discussed the fall-out from the MP's expenses issue, and the impact that it had upon the local and European elections but we also remembered what will be at stake in a general election - the Tories have not yet fleshed out their policies but even so, we know from their friends in the Institute of Directors and Taxpayers' Alliance just how severe Tory cuts might be.

I've always believed Jane and Joe Public to be a sensible folk and our job is to remind them what they stand to lose by putting their cross in the wrong box, as well as what more Labour can do. A focus on housing, and the role of local councils for instance, should be a central platform in our election manifesto.

The fight to win starts now and win we can.