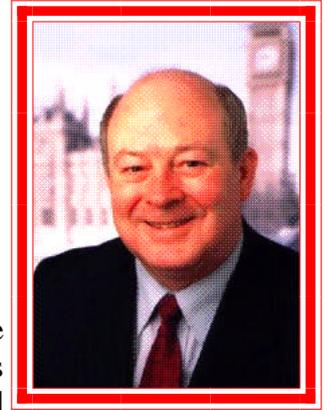


Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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Parliamentary Selection Timetable

Now that I have decided to retire, the process of selecting the Parliamentary candidate to stand in the Gateshead constituency for the Labour Party has begun. The NEC has decided to have an open shortlist, consisting of both men and women. All interested persons must submit their cvs by Friday 12 February. The NEC will announce who will be on the shortlist on 18 February. There will be a hustings at 6.30 at the civic centre on Friday 26 February. It will be an all postal ballot, which must be received by 3 March. The result will be announced on 4 March.



North East Apprenticeship Company

Minister Iain Wright marked National Apprenticeship Week by launching the North East Apprenticeship Company here in Gateshead. At the same time, the Backing Young Britain initiative will offer unemployed 16-24 year olds either a job (supported by a £1000 subsidy for the employer), training (from short courses to those lasting up to 6 months), work experience or apprenticeships.



Newcastle Central Social Evening



I was delighted to able to join former colleagues and friends from Scotswood and Elswick wards at a fundraising social evening, and to express my support for the Parliamentary candidate Che Onuwara, a very able and clever woman, a most capable politician and, most importantly, a nice persona and a good socialist. I sincerely

hope she wins - and confidently predict we'll soon see her on the front bench.

Western Bypass Traffic Problems

Virtually ever since I became MP for Tyne Bridge, I have lobbied Ministers for improvements to the A1 Western Bypass. So, I was very concerned to learn that the Highways Agency is considering imposing a 50mph limit on the Gateshead stretch of the bypass.

At peak times, 50mph remains a remote aspiration and why slow down free-moving traffic at other times? Apparently the Agency is thinking of introducing narrow lanes as a cheap alternative to the real improvements we all want to see and in sharp contrast to the £millions being spent on the AIM to the south of our region.

I spoke to Transport Secretary Lord Adonis about this and other transport issues affecting our constituency and region, such as High Speed Rail, when we met recently in the House of Commons

Not a Legg to stand on

The three MPs who have are to be hauled before the courts may or may not be guilty, but is there any chance in the hysteria whipped up by the press on this issue that there is a judge or jury anywhere in the UK that can truly look dispassionately at their cases and ensure a fair trial?

I do not often find myself in agreement with Alan Beith and Ann Widdecombe on the same issue, but I know from personal experience that the Legg enquiry into MPs' expenses was sloppy, inconsistent, and inaccurate.

This has been a grim narrative, a sorry and shameful episode for Parliament, ruining reputations and, in the longer term, scarring our democracy. Parliament must now institute new systems that both command public confidence and preserve the essence of our democracy that ensures that every citizen has an equal opportunity to stand for election and is able to do the job if elected regardless of their means.

Comment

Despite all the column inches about the effect of the parliamentary expenses scandal on voting intentions, I firmly believe that the economy will be the key to winning the next General Election.

The polls are up and down, but the lead that Cameron held this time last year is now completely a thing of the past. The volatility of the polls is the clearest indication that the voting public is beginning to realise exactly what a Cameron government would mean for them and their families in financial terms, and they do not like it.

It is particularly so in the north east, where almost two thirds of the working population are employed in the public sector which accounts for 53% of our GDP. We would suffer disproportionately from the 'deep' cuts that Osborne believes are the only way to aid economic recovery, despite the fact that the head of IMF has warned against withdrawing support too early and pushing economies back into recession.

Tough times are ahead for all of us. It's true that a Labour government's actions wouldn't be painless either - but the public can trust Labour to be fair in line with Labour values and I firmly believe, as voters see more evidence of the green shoots of recovery, they will realise that they need the slash and burn tactics of the Tories like a hole in the head. There are, for instance, around 5000 families in Gateshead receiving Child Tax Credits. Both Tories and Lib Dems have said that those with incomes over £50,000 should lose CTC entitlement. But they're talking about a *household* income of £50,000 which actually equates to mum and dad each earning £25,000 - hardly high earnings.

Meanwhile, Gordon Brown has once more demonstrated his stature on the international stage by guiding and goading the DUP and Sinn Fein to Hillsborough Castle to reach the agreement to finally complete the devolution of power to **Northern Ireland**. The Northern Ireland peace process has been a long and painful journey but this last stage, which includes the de-commissioning of all parties' weapons, simply would not have happened without pressure from Gordon Brown.

Parliament

The parliamentary expenses scandal has undoubtedly scarred our democracy and breached the bond of trust between the people and those elected to serve them. To help rebuild that trust, the Prime Minister has set out a radical programme of constitutional and parliamentary reform, including legislation for a referendum on the Alternative Vote system next year. But, whatever voting system is introduced, the excitement of the count that same night will continue - MPs voted to stop local authorities from postponing the count until the following day.

Legislation passing through the Commons this last month included the **Fiscal Responsibility Bill** which imposes a statutory duty on the Treasury to meet specific targets for government borrowing and debt. The government believes that this legislation demonstrates its commitment to ensuring the sustainability of the public finances. It also gives Parliament a greater role in fiscal policy.

The Commons also dealt with the **Financial Services Bill**, the third piece of financial services legislation since 2007 to respond to the banking crisis. It creates a Council for Financial Stability to

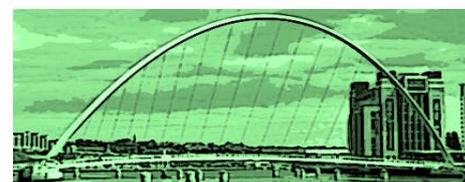
co-ordinate the Bank of England, the FSA and the Treasury.

The **Crime and Security Bill** also received a Second Reading. This Bill imposes new limits on the retention of DNA samples, new provisions for breaching Asbos and new licensing for businesses carrying out vehicle immobilisation.

The **Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill** is a wide-ranging Bill, including many provisions from the 'Governance of Britain' White Paper such as the provision for the suspension, resignation and expulsion of Members of the House of Lords, the end of by-elections for the hereditary peers and the end of the PM's role in the appointment of Supreme Court Judges.

The **Terrorist Asset Freezing Bill** restores the validity of the Terrorism Orders and the designations made under them to freeze assets and moneys owned by individuals or groups suspected of terrorism.

I visited Manchester with the **Transport Select Committee** in connection with our Ports inquiry and travelled to Brussels to join in discussions on general transport issues in the European context.



Constituency

I have held my usual advice surgeries without anything in particular to report.

I have had a brief discussion with the Leader of Gateshead council about the development of the Town Centre and further discussions are planned.