

Gateshead Constituency Labour Party **Parliamentary Report**

David Clelland MP

www.david-clelland.org.uk

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Bringing Britain Out of Recession

Last week's Queen's Speech built upon the measures set out in last month's Pre-Budget report, setting out the legislative programme that will enable Britain not only to meet the economic challenges facing us but to emerge from the downturn as a fairer and stronger society. Bills include a Banking Bill to strengthen the UK's framework for financial stability and depositor protection; a Borders Bill to strengthen our borders and make changes to the nationality law, a Business Rate Supplements Bill to enable councils to raise additional funds, a Welfare Reform Bill, a Children, Skills and Learning Bill to reform training and apprenticeships, an Equality Bill to combine existing legislation into one piece of legislation, a Health Bill, a Policing and Crime Bill, a Political Parties and Elections Bill and a Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill to 'devolve influence power and control over local services to citizens, communities and councils.'

A Stronger Voice for Carers



I attended the launch of the 'Stronger Voice for Carers' project in Gateshead, which seeks to raise awareness of carers' rights, build links with policy and academic research as well as working towards the production of a carers' manifesto which will serve as a tool to develop public debate on the challenges faced by carers within the current framework of support and resourcing
(above with project lead Laura Dixon and Elsie Johnson)

Meeting with Transport Secretary of State

I had the opportunity to speak to Geoff Hoon about the deficiencies in the major road infrastructure in the north east, and asked when we could expect the upgrading of the A1 Dishforth to Scotch Corner dual carriageway to begin, as well as pressing him on upgrading to national motorway standards the entire A1 including the A1 Western Bypass and the dualing of the A66, A69 and the A1 north of Newcastle.



Gateshead Diwali

The Hindu 'Festival of Light' was held at Gateshead Old Town Hall this year as the Civic Centre was unavailable due to refurbishment works. As always, we enjoyed the wonderful joyous festival, good food good company and some of the best 'Bollywood' dancing I have ever seen!

Parliament

Doing nothing was not a serious option - unless you're a Tory - so last month's **Pre-Budget Report**, usually a staid and fairly dull affair, became the tool by which the government hopes to stop the economic and financial crisis from deepening into a full-blown recession.

The Government produced a set of good, solid, well-thought out measures that seem to be supported by economists, businessmen and even foreign governments who are bringing in roughly the same proposals. Ironically, the 2.5% VAT cut was dismissed immediately by the Tories as meaningless and too small to have a significant impact etc - yet only days later, when a long-discarded idea of a VAT increase of 1% was 'discovered', it was heralded as a 'tax bombshell' that would bring families to their knees!

The **Queens Speech** to Parliament then built upon these measures, setting out proposals to build a fairer future for all with bills to **eradicate child poverty**, to promote **equality**, to promote **excellence in schools**. The access to education, training and apprenticeships will give our young people the skills and education to equip them for future challenges. And **fairer rules for communities** - support for communities wanting a crackdown on crime, a fairer say in how their communities are policed (although I have reservations about some of these proposals), tougher measures on crime and punishment.

This last week therefore saw the introduction of some of the main planks of the legislative framework - the **Banking Bill**, the **Business Rates Supplements Bill**,

the **Saving Gateway Accounts Bill** and the **Corporation Tax Bill**.

I had a cooler welcome for the **Political Parties and Elections Bill** which confers additional powers on the Electoral Commission as well as making new provision about political donations and expenditure. I remain concerned about aspects of this Bill, and will be watching it carefully.

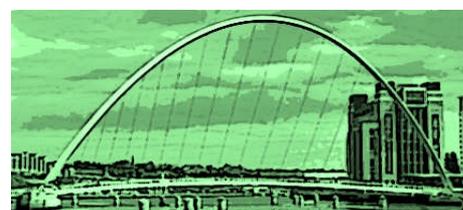
Unfortunately, the Queens Speech was completely overshadowed by the row over the **arrest of Tory MP Damien Green** and the subsequent search of his Commons' office as police pursued the source of leaks from the Home office. Clearly the Commons' Serjeant at Arms does not watch any TV cop shows, and failed to ask for a search warrant beforehand. But it was also curiously insensitive that the police themselves didn't feel the need to get a search warrant. As a result, some Members - mostly from the Opposition, enjoying the opportunity to attack both a Speaker who offends their class instinct and, indirectly, the Government - are baying about the abuse of Parliamentary privilege. But MPs are not, and should not be, above the law and the police should operate independently of Ministerial direction, and continue to do so.

Indeed, I recall that the operational independence of the police was asserted very clearly in the 'cash for honours' investigation two years ago. But I don't recall Tories protesting too much then about the dawn arrest of a Number 10 employee or, indeed, the police interview of the Prime Minister.

The Speaker made a Statement explaining his decisions to the House and, in a further debate on

the subject this week, Members voted to hold an enquiry once police enquiries into the breach of confidentiality have been completed.

I also had the opportunity this month to meet privately with the **Prime Minister** to highlight issues of concern to the region, and to our region in particular. I found it a useful meeting, as was my meeting with **Transport Secretary Geoff Hoon**. I have also met representatives from **One North East**, the **Tobacco Manufacturers Association** and the **Working Mens' Clubs Union** - indeed, I also met with **Communities Secretary Hazel Blears** to discuss current difficulties faced by working mens' social clubs.



Constituency

In addition to the activities listed on the front page, I have also met with representatives from **Nexus** to discuss the Metro modernisation plans - I also facilitated a meeting in the Commons between MPs and Nexus to discuss the issues and allay Members' concerns.

I was also able to attend the **Bridges and Deckham ward** party meeting which, as always, provided a useful opportunity to discuss current issues. I am conscious that I haven't been able to visit every ward party this year but I'll do my best to remedy that in the near future.



*Happy Christmas and
best wishes for 2009
to all members*