



Valerie hosts epilepsy meeting



The All Party Parliamentary Group on Epilepsy, which I chair, met on 2 March to discuss 'Improving patient outcomes: Establishing a national epilepsy register'. Over 50 people attended; experts on epilepsy, hospital and charity workers and individuals who've experienced epilepsy in their lives first hand. There was a good discussion, with speakers Prof Helen Cross OBE, Dr Amit Bali, and Dr Colin Dunkley.

Visit to Capita, Lower Hall Lane



Constituents contacted me to say PIP applicants, many of whom have difficulty walking or are wheelchair users, were being asked to climb stairs to first floor consultation rooms. I raised the issue of accessibility, and Capita responded that they complied with the Equality Act and Building Regulations. I visited the Centre unannounced in December 2015 and found that no changes had been made. But at a meeting on 11 March 2016 Capita confirmed assessments will no longer take place on the first floor. It was disappointing that this has taken so long to resolve, but I am pleased Capita accepted my representations. The photograph shows me with my constituent, Andy Brown.

Mother's Day at Bramble Hedge



with the winners.

Andrea Rodgers, of Bramble Hedge Florist, kindly asked me to judge a competition she was holding for Mother's Day. 3 and 4 year old children at a nursery drew a picture of their mums. On Friday 4 March, I picked two winners, one in each age group, and the winning "mum" received a bouquet of flowers. Bramble Hedge Florist supplied one bouquet, and I donated the second. The photo shows me and Andrea

Petition against closure of HMRC office in Walsall



The PCS union held a rally in the Town Centre to draw attention to the closure of the HMRC Office, which is worth £1 million to the local economy. Over 60 staff will have to transfer or lose their jobs. The closure was announced by the Government in November 2015 without any public or



parliamentary consultation. On Saturday 5 March, the GMB union joined the members of the PCS union. More than 500 members of the public signed the petition opposing the closure, which I presented in Parliament on Wednesday 23 March 2016.

International Women's Day



I spoke in the debate to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March 2016 and raised local and international issues. The gender pay gap remains at 14% in this country, and two constituents who worked for Birmingham City Council are still waiting for their pay-out following a 2008 equal pay judgement. I mentioned the cases of Jyoti Singh, who was gang raped and murdered on a bus in Delhi in 2012, and the kidnapping of Nigerian girls in 2014. In 2016 there should not still be firsts for women.

Valerie raises the deportation of criminals



On behalf of a constituent, I raised the issue of the deportation of a person who has been convicted of a crime. At Justice Questions on 8 March 2016 an opportunity came up to ask the Minister to look at this case. The Minister was sympathetic and asked me to write to him. I have written to support the victim/survivor.

NHS Bill 2015

The NHS Bill 2015 reached its second reading on Friday 11 March, which I attended. I support the overall objectives of the Bill, in particular restoring accountability for the delivery of the health services to the Secretary of State, and the requirement that a comprehensive health service continues to be provided free of charge. Some concerns remain, however, about further unnecessary reorganizations of the NHS. Labour believes that the encroaching privatisation of the NHS must be halted, and that international agreements, such as TTIP, should not affect decision-making. Labour will seek to amend the Bill as such if it proceeds.

Commonwealth Day



I celebrated Commonwealth Day on Monday 14 March 2016 and intervened in an adjournment debate. The Commonwealth represents 53 nations, and I said that the UK is its interface with the European Union, which places us in a very great position. The staff of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) do an amazing job, organizing visits for the world to see what it is like to live in this country under a rule of law.

Valerie joins the EFRA Select Committee



I am now a member of the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee. I met farmers, small businesses, and food and drink producers for Cheshire Day and Shropshire Day, held in March, to discuss the pressures they are currently facing, and I was delighted to sample a diverse range of local produce. I spoke to Helen from the National Farmers' Union (NFU). We discussed the importance of backing British farming, which is worth £9.4 billion to the UK economy and provides 3.5 million jobs.

Westminster Hall debate on Burma



I spoke in a Westminster Hall debate on Burma on Wednesday 23 March and said that the election of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to the cabinet and Htin Yaw as the first civilian president marks a new era for Burma. The establishment of an Ethnic Minority Ministry reflects this. I called for a truth and reconciliation forum so that the country can move on, and called on the Government to



ensure there is access to humanitarian aid for internally displaced people, and help and rehabilitation for women who have been the victims of sexual violence.

News in Brief

- **Chairing Debates and Committees**

On Monday 7 March 2016, as an elected member of the Panel of Chairs, I chaired a Westminster Hall debate on E-petition 118060.

- **Driving Instructors Bill**

I sat as a member of the Driving Instructors (Registration) Bill Committee on 1 March 2016. The Bill was introduced by Sir David Amess MP, and provides for two deregulatory measures to simplify the registration of driving instructors.

- **Multinational Enterprises (Financial Transparency) Bill**

On 11 March 2016 I backed the Bill, which is designed to place information about the dealings of multinational companies in the public domain. In my view, it is important that the public know whether international companies are paying their fair share of tax.
