



Valerie meets the Queen at the British Museum



On 8 November HM The Queen re-opened the Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery of China and South Asia at the British Museum. The Gallery explores the cultures of China and South Asian countries - India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal - through a range of magnificent artefacts from 5000BC to present day. I was delighted to be presented to Her Majesty. One of the first campaigns I led in Parliament, with sculptor Karen Newman (right), was to place a sculpture of Noor Inayat Khan in Gordon Square.



Noor was one of the female operatives in Winston Churchill's Special Operations Executive.

Valerie attends Black Country Showcase Event

Parliament showcased the breadth of talent of local businesses in the Black Country on 1 November. Local businesses set up stalls with high-quality products and demonstrated the key role the Black Country plays in so many sectors from high-tech manufacturing to traditional industries. I spoke to constituents Maqq and Ikram from Air Guard who manufacture air filters for a range of sectors. The filters help their clients conserve energy and increase efficiency. I also met Tony Sartorius, Chairman of Alucast, who supply machined, painted and assembled aluminium components from its site in Wednesbury and made part of the Olympic Torch.



Government defeat on Brexit Economic Impact Studies



An Opposition Day motion was passed by the House to order the Government to release documents on the effects of Brexit on 58 areas of the economy that represent 88% of the UK economy. The Government still has not provided the complete assessments to the Exiting the EU Committee. MPs have a right on behalf of the whole country to have that information, and to make sense of and correct some of the misinformation that came out during the referendum.

Business Questions 2 November

I asked the Leader of the House for a debate on the CQC report on the review of children and young people's mental health services. The CQC found that the mental health care system as a whole is complex and fragmented. I called on the Government to support the Bill on Seni Lewis who died in a mental health unit. The Bill aims to prevent the disproportionate use of force against mental health patients. Following the Government's defeat, I asked for an update on when the full Brexit Economic Impact Studies would be delivered to the Exiting the EU Committee. A Select Committee cannot produce a report unless it has all the information before it. I also raised the issue about sexual harassment in Parliament following recent allegations. I reinforced Labour's commitment to finding a common process that will deal with these serious issues.



Diwali at The New Art Gallery



I attended the Diwali celebrations at NAG Walsall on 4 November. Surjit Rai did a great job again organising the event. This year's theme was Kerala and why it has been named the Spice Garden of India. Diwali is a uniquely uniting festival which brings together people of different faiths: Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs, some Buddhists and those who are of no faith. I saw the Turner exhibition and encourage everyone to visit it. It runs until 18 January 2018.

Valerie welcomes members of the Youth Parliament

On 10 November I closed the debate on the 18th annual sitting of the Youth Parliament and the 9th year they have sat in the Chamber. MYPs voted on the topics they will campaign on next year, which are 'curriculum to prepare us for life' and 'votes at 16'. The voices of the MYPs rang out from the Chamber and beyond through live-streaming and our Official Report. Each MYP was brilliantly prepared and offered wonderful contributions to the debates, they showed us great hope for the future.



Business Questions 16 November



I raised the recent comments from Conservative MP John Redwood in his role as an investment manager. He warned his clients not to invest in the UK because of the state of the economy. I raised the point that the Government do not know the size of the EU Withdrawal Divorce Bill; and why eviction notices were sent out following the roll-out of Universal Credit 38 days before Christmas, this is a heartless Government whose policies are hurting the most vulnerable in society. I asked the Government, jokingly, if there was the new game "I'm a Cabinet Minister get me out of here" following two resignations.

Parliament Week 2017



Schools across the UK have been marking UK Parliament Week which seeks to engage more people with national politics. A total of 4,596 activities took place across the UK during the week, and on average 7 activities took place in each constituency. I am pleased that 10th Darlaston Girl Guides and Brownies and Walsall Society for the Blind organised events to engage people locally in Walsall South. When individuals get involved, our democracy becomes stronger.

Remembrance Sunday

On Sunday 12 November I attended two Remembrance Sunday Services. I took part in the Civic Procession from the Council House to the Cenotaph, at the Town Centre and also in Darlaston. I laid a wreath at both events, made by disabled ex-servicemen, in memory of those who paid the ultimate price for our freedom. The sounding of The Last Post by a Bugler rang out at 11am before the 2 minutes silence was observed in Walsall Town Centre. Every year these events on Remembrance Sunday are always well supported by the people of Walsall.



Budget 2017

The Chancellor of the Exchequer presented a 'nothing has changed' Budget on 22 November confirming that we are worse off under a Tory Government. There was no mention of the words "disability" or "people with disabilities", no meaningful funding for our schools, no solution for the crisis in our NHS, or funding to address the public sector pay cap that is still holding back the wages of our firefighters, police, teachers and NHS staff. The Budget provided little reassurance on the rollout of Universal Credit which is causing suffering in our communities. Real wages are lower than they were in 2010 and the Budget confirmed a further hit to living standards with disposable income set to fall in 2017.

Withdrawal from the EU Update

This month the EU Withdrawal Bill entered the Committee Stage of the whole House and this was debated for 3 days. Labour supported the following amendments to the Bill:

- A Conservative Backbench Amendment to protect human rights after an exit led to a concession from the Government. A Labour amendment to preserve EU human rights, was defeated by 10 votes.
- A Labour amendment calling for EU environmental laws to be retained, which was defeated by 20 votes.
- Labour amendments which would have ensured that changes to employment rights, environmental protection and other EU regulations would have to be through primary legislation, was defeated.
- The Government conceded that Parliament will get a binding vote on the final Brexit deal.

Business Questions 23 November



I asked the Leader of the House why the List of Ministers interests has not been updated in almost a year; we need transparency with the ongoing trade negotiations. I called for an urgent statement from the Justice Secretary, cuts of 40% to the Ministry of Justice budget are having an impact on the ability of the most vulnerable in our society to access justice. The Office for Budget Responsibility has said that Brexit played a part in weak productivity, which has resulted in a revised downward growth forecast. I called on the Chancellor to address what measures will be taken to kick-start a stagnant economy.

Valerie attends Disability Confident event in Walsall

Disability Confident employers are those who have identified and removed barriers to the recruitment of disabled people, tapped into the support available, and hired local disabled job seekers. Mark Sherratt's inspiring story was about how he overcame the barriers to employment with the Light Cinema. The Disability Confident scheme, launched by the DWP, encourages businesses to adopt more inclusive working practices and recognise the value of employing disabled people. Any employers interested in the Disability Confident scheme can contact the GOV.UK website. I encourage local businesses to make the most of the talents of disabled people in the workplace.



'More Memories of Darlaston Over the Years'



I attended Darlaston Library to hear stories shared from families and friends who have spent most of their lives living and working in Darlaston in Tony Highfield's book titled 'More Memories of Darlaston Over the Years'. Tony's book launch took place on 25 November 2017. Darlaston has a rich history and the book includes many wonderful photographs taken over the years. Tony is an avid photographer and is always present to record key events in Darlaston.



Business Questions 30 November



I announced that the Labour's Opposition Day debate will be on Universal Credit; and asked why there is no general "amendment to the law resolution" after the PM made an unprecedented move to prevent MPs from changing legislation on the Budget; I asked why the full sectoral analysis have still not been provided to the Exiting the EU Committee and raised a case of a constituent who has been penalised in her PIP assessment and called for parity of esteem in PIP assessments; I called for a statement as to how the Government are dealing with errors in the payment of ESA which has affected 75,000 people. Only 1,000 people have been contacted.
