

View From the House

During the Parliamentary Recess the Government announced a number of u-turns; on secret courts, Vat on static caravans, pasty tax and more recently killing buzzards. This is not about the Government listening. The Government should have heard the concerns before the legislation is passed rather than afterwards.

And as we head from the Jubilee to the Olympics, one of the last debates in the House was on Sunday Trading. For 8 consecutive Sundays from 22 July 2012, before the opening ceremony until 9 September 2012 after the closing ceremony for the Paralympics, the provisions of the Sunday Trading Act 1994 will be relaxed. I spoke against these provisions because in my view it is bad for working people, family life and there is no evidence to suggest it is good for business.

The Association of Convenience Stores said the cost to the 4,000 convenience stores during this time could reach £480 million. Relaxing Sunday trading would cost £1,500 per convenience store each Sunday. Usdaw the retail union say that, already, over a third of their staff are under pressure to work on Sundays when they do not wish to. I will continue to oppose any attempts to a further relaxation of Sunday trading legislation once the Games are over.

The controversy surrounding the outsourcing of court interpreters has raised concerns regarding the administration of justice. I was presented with a dossier by a group of interpreters of examples of failings of the current company. Previously, courts were able to select nationally registered interpreters. Now, to save costs, interpreters are expected to travel to Court hearings and are not reimbursed for their travel time. From 30 January to 30 April 2012, the current providers provided an interpreter in only 81% of cases despite a performance target of 98%. I have raised this issue in Parliament in a question to the Minister and sent a letter with the dossier to the Lord Chancellor.

So it's back to Parliament this week and my Adjournment Debate on Women and Science. My concern is the withdrawal of funding to UKRC an organisation which supports women in Science. Only 5.3%, or about 1 in 20, of all working women are employed in Science and related careers compared to 31.3% for all working men. Under-representation of women in Science costs 15 to 23 billion or 1.3 to 2 per cent of GDP. I hope the Government listens to these concerns now.

Valerie Vaz

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