

View from the House

Following the Comprehensive Spending Review on the 20 October, I have been contacted by many constituents who have been worried about the impact of the review on them.

The proposed cuts are likely to hit the West Midlands hard. Reductions in welfare assistance for vulnerable people, and in services such as policing, will make it difficult for local people and businesses to bounce back from the effects of the recession. The public sector provides many jobs in our region – particularly for women - and cutbacks will also lead to job losses for the private sector. In Walsall, more than 75% of public sector jobs are held by women.

I have heard from several people with disabilities who are worried that changes to the welfare system will hit them disproportionately. I have raised their concerns about fairness in written questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Another part of the Government's cost cutting exercise has been the abolition of Child Trust Funds, along with the Health in Pregnancy Grant and Savings Gateway scheme. The second reading of the bill was passed. Along with many members, I spoke against the abolition in a debate in the House of Commons on 26th October 2010.

Child Trust Funds cost the government about £525m per year. However the amount raised from even a modest bank levy like the one in 2009, raised £2.3 billion. The Child Trust Funds nurtured a savings culture and provided young people with a good way to start to understand how to deal with money.

When they reach 18, the money which is held in trust for them and cannot be touched by anyone, could help with for example university fees. I am disappointed that this opportunity for children and their families is being dismantled.

I raised the issue of human rights in Iran and Burma with the Prime Minister at Question Time in September. Aung San Suu Kyi who is elected in Burma is still unable to take part in the forthcoming elections due to take place on the 7 November.

On 25th October, I was one of 119 MPs across all parties who signed a letter which was delivered to the Iranian Embassy calling on the President of Iran to free Sakineh Ashtiani.

She was imprisoned on a charge of 'adultery' and has been repeatedly threatened with execution by stoning or hanging. We are waiting for a response and hope she will be saved from this terrible fate.

Valerie Vaz MP