

View From the House

One of the fastest pieces of legislation that has come before the House is the enactment of the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Bill. This fast track legislation contains sweeping surveillance powers that will affect every man, woman and child in the UK. The Bill contains the powers for Government to continue to mandate the blanket retention of the communications data of the whole population for 12 months.

This is in direct contradiction of a Court judgment which held that blanket indiscriminate retention of communications data breached human rights. The Government's surveillance powers have been extended.

My concerns are with the speed with which the Bill will be passed. It will be debated in one day, and without a proper scrutiny which would have allowed some amendments, just before Recess. It also attempts to overrule a Court Judgment. Blanket data retention such as requested in this Bill has been held superfluous, harmful or even unconstitutional in many States across Europe, including in Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, Belgium, Austria, Sweden and Greece.

The Bill is currently due to expire on 31 December 2016, two and a half years away. I would have preferred an earlier date for expiry say by December 2014. In my view this rides roughshod over parliamentary sovereignty and by overruling a Court Judgment, it shows contempt for the Rule of Law.

Many of you have written to me to express concerns and alarm over the situation in Gaza. So far the death toll of civilians and more importantly children has reached 160 with no fatalities in Israel. I have written to the Foreign Secretary to ask that he urges both sides to call a ceasefire so that peace talks can continue and innocent civilians are not caught up in this war. This has been by far the most contacts I have received on an issue.

Turning to the NHS, concerns have been raised about Sai Medical Practise which appears to have a large number of locums rather than permanent GPs. Malling Health holds the contract. The CQC have found at another Medical Centre run by Malling Health that : "There were not effective systems in place to reduce the risk and spread of infection, not all staff were qualified to work with patients, or had been through recruitment checks." This is not acceptable. I have raised my concerns with the CCG and with the CQC.

I wish you all a restful summer break.

VALERIE VAZ MP

13 July 2014