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Report from Sharon Hodgson MP



MPs give a standing ovation for Ukrainian President Zelenskyy's address to Parliament. (Copyright UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor, '22)

Ukraine

As I'm sure we all do, I watch on in horror as Vladimir Putin's Kremlin wages a heart-breaking, illegal war in Ukraine. I cannot help but be moved by images of Ukrainians fleeing their homeland, unsure if it will be independent ever again.

Showing real grit from the front lines, Ukrainian president Zelenskyy is an inspirational leader. Amid reports that the Russian war machine is faltering due to soviet-era tactics and logistical flaws, Zelenskyy's press conferences and addresses (including an historic address to Parliament for which he received a rare standing ovation) galvanise the Ukrainians. I was honoured to hear Zelenskyy speak in Parliament.

The crisis highlights why Labour was instrumental in forming NATO and why our commitment to the alliance remains unshakeable. As Russia ignores the law of armed conflict to commit war crimes, co-operation between NATO members and beyond is paramount. Labour calls on the Government to provide Ukraine with as much military, economic and practical support as is necessary.

In the UK, the difficulty faced when sanctioning Russian

oligarchs highlighted the shroud under which Russian money hides. The oligarchs' Russian 'dirty money', sealed away in shell companies and property schemes, must be brought to light. However, the Tories' asset-friendly regulatory environment makes this difficult. Labour would set this straight, cracking open the shell companies and lifting the lid on property. After all, we cannot freeze the assets of people if we do not know where those assets are.

My team has been offering support to constituents with family in Ukraine, who have been trying to apply for the Ukraine Family Scheme visa. Families fleeing conflict in Ukraine need urgent help right now to reach safety and get support.

There has been complete confusion for those trying to make the journey. Many have been held up in Calais and it is completely unfair for those Ukrainians who have fled the terror of war. Labour has called for emergency protection visas for those fleeing Ukraine who want to reach the UK. It would lift normal visa conditions other than biometrics and security checks which can be swiftly done en route. This would provide a quick, simple and safe route to sanctuary for all who need it.

We are relieved the Home Secretary has finally simplified some of the bureaucracy faced by some refugees fleeing Putin's illegal war. But she could have done this weeks ago. The chaos and lack of planning has been deeply damaging.

Local Campaigning

In March we had the pleasure of welcoming the Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves to Washington South Ward to launch Cllr Graeme Miller's re-election campaign, and I also carried out a roving street surgery in Rickleton to listen to residents' concerns about their local area.

It is important to keep up the great work in showing how Labour will deliver upon our local manifesto to make Sunderland, Washington and the Coalfields stronger. I look forward to joining more canvassing sessions in the run up to the local elections on May 5th.

Spring Statement

On Wednesday 23rd March, the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak delivered his Spring Statement to the House of Commons. I was appalled as the Chancellor announced that he is raising taxes again and again, only to offer crumbs just before the next general election. I was proud to sit behind Rachel Reeves, our Labour Shadow Chancellor, as she held this Tory Government to account for making this cost of living crisis worse, not better. What the Chancellor gave us was a high tax, low growth spring statement that leaves the British people with the highest tax burden in 70 years, and living standards falling at the fastest rate since records began. Despite the Chancellor's fanfare, for every £6 he is taking off you, you're only getting £1 back. He is the opposite of a tax cutting Chancellor. Labour would tax fairly, spend wisely, and grow our economy. Earlier this month, I voted in favour of cancelling the Government's increase in national insurance contributions because it will cost families an average of £500 per year. I believe this is a heavy burden on working people and businesses who could ill afford it. Regrettably, the Government have gone ahead with their planned tax rise. In this year's spring statement, the Chancellor has left households and businesses to fend for themselves in the middle of a cost of living crisis, as we're set to see the biggest drop to incomes on record this year.

DWP Durham House closure, Washington



The last few weeks came with the news that the Government's Department of Work and Pensions will be closing its offices in Durham House. They plan to transition to Wear View House in Sunderland City Centre, taking 945 jobs away from Washington. This will be catastrophic for our town centre and I will be doing everything I can to make the Government reverse its decision. This is the largest closure as part of a wider package announced by the Government on Thursday 17 March amounting to 1100 DWP job losses and

42 centre closures which will risk a further 7000 jobs. In taking away quality public sector jobs from local communities who need them (1,300 of those affected are in the North East), the Tories' rhetoric has been exposed as utterly hollow.

I'm collecting signatures on my petition. If you would like to sign my petition which will be taken to Parliament, please follow this link on my website: <https://tinyurl.com/y3kua3nm>

Boundary Commission hearing, Newcastle



On Monday 28th March I attended the in-person hearing to give oral evidence against the Boundary Review Commission's proposals for Sunderland constituencies. Their proposal keeps Washington wards together, but puts Sunderland wards in with Jarrow, ignoring all community ties and identities. Sunderland wards are being split up across 5 constituencies. The Labour Party Proposal, keeps current Washington and Sunderland West wards together, minus St Anne's which goes to Houghton and Sunderland South, and incorporates into our constituency the Gateshead wards of Birtley and Lamesley from the current Blaydon constituency. The proposed name for the constituency would be Washington, Birtley and Sunderland North. The second consultation period is until 4 April, and I would urge residents and members to submit their own evidence as every submission helps guide the final proposals, go to: <https://www.bcereviews.org.uk> to submit.

Neurodiversity in Business launch

It has been an unusually busy month for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and other SpLDs. For the first time, Parliament heard from the Dyscalculia community. Dyscalculics tend to struggle with numeracy, both basic and advanced. However, when compared to other forms of neurodivergence such as Autism or Dyslexia, Dyscalculia is underdiagnosed and underrecognised. This must change, which is why the APPG is investigating a form of universal screening for neurodiversity in schoolchildren. I was also proud to help launch a new initiative, Neurodiversity in Business, which will show companies just how valuable the neurodiverse are. With over a hundred sector-leading businesses already signed up, I look forward to seeing it flourish.

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