

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT  
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

## PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

*Sixth Sitting*

*Wednesday 13 June 2018*

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Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 20 June at half-past Nine o'clock.

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**Sunday 17 June 2018**

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**The Committee consisted of the following Members:***Chairs:* †Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy ( <i>Telford</i> ) (Con)	Mills, Nigel ( <i>Amber Valley</i> ) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter ( <i>Wellingborough</i> ) (Con)	† Norris, Alex ( <i>Nottingham North</i> ) (Lab/Co-op)
Charalambous, Bambos ( <i>Enfield, Southgate</i> ) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian ( <i>North Antrim</i> ) (DUP)
† Fletcher, Colleen ( <i>Coventry North East</i> ) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe ( <i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i> )
† Foster, Kevin ( <i>Torbay</i> ) (Con)	Stewart, Bob ( <i>Beckenham</i> ) (Con)
† Harper, Mr Mark ( <i>Forest of Dean</i> ) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill ( <i>North Herefordshire</i> ) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal ( <i>Manchester, Gorton</i> ) (Lab)	
Lee, Karen ( <i>Lincoln</i> ) (Lab)	Kenneth Fox, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David ( <i>Glasgow East</i> ) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian ( <i>City of Chester</i> ) (Lab)	† <b>attended the Committee</b>

## Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 13 June 2018

[Ms NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

### Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

9.30 am

**The Chair:** Before we begin, I have the usual announcements. Anyone who wants to may take off their jacket. Tea and coffee are not allowed. Please switch your phones to silent mode. As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed to move a money resolution, we cannot discuss the Bill, so I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

**Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

I thank all hon. Members for attending this Committee sitting of the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill. Once again, I must express my extreme frustration at the Government for their refusal to follow basic parliamentary procedures and bring forward a money resolution. For all the talk of concern for parliamentary sovereignty, the Government have shown profound disrespect for the parliamentary process. This is an embarrassment to the UK Government, and their refusal to provide a sensible rationale for their actions shows that their aim in this matter is clearly undemocratic.

I want to make something clear: I disagree firmly with many Conservative policies, but have absolutely no hard feelings towards the Conservative electorate or their parliamentary representatives. I know from public debates and private conversations that the Bill has support from various Conservative Members of Parliament. The Second Reading of the Bill was passed unanimously, which is clear evidence of the broadly based support for sensible electoral updates. The issue is with the Executive and the blatantly undemocratic actions that they have taken.

I wish to have those critical discussions of the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill. That should be what we are here to do. However, we cannot engage in the discussions until the Government have complied with the basic parliamentary conventions. The Bill has received a Second Reading and requires a money resolution for its further progress.

I am not sympathetic to claims of financial irresponsibility. The Bill is designed to address widely held concerns about the make-up of our parliamentary democracy. Ideally, the Bill would be unnecessary, but unfortunately the previous Boundary Commission set out instructions that do not command support from the House. That said, if the House of Commons deems that the Bill would be an improper use of funds, that would be a valid result, but the Government have refused to table a money resolution and let Members exercise their judgment, as is their duty.

I hope that the Government will respect the will of the people of the UK and respect the parliamentary process, which they claim to hold dear. I will continue to press, through every avenue available to me, for progress

on this matter. I thank everyone for their attention, although I must apologise that these important sittings have become a routine drain on parliamentary time and resources. I thank everyone again for their time. I hope to see everyone next week and that we will have the opportunity to make better use of our privilege to represent the people of the UK.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): What a pleasure it is to be back for the sixth episode of “I’m in a Public Bill Committee...Get Me Out of Here!” Once again, we come here for the charade that we are here to scrutinise legislation—legislation that was passed democratically on the Floor of the House of Commons last year. I have now passed my first-year anniversary in this place, and with every week that goes by, something new comes up to present me with the idea that Westminster is a place of limited democracy. Last night, we met for a whole 19 minutes to debate and scrutinise crucial amendments about devolution. That was one minute longer than the sitting of this Committee last week, when we sat for a whole 18 minutes to scrutinise the Bill. Of course, the absolute nonsense that—

**The Chair:** Order. Please keep to the motion, Mr Linden.

**David Linden:** Absolutely, Ms Dorries; thank you for your reminder to do that. I was reminded that Parliament is taking back control by leaving the European Union and that we will have all this parliamentary sovereignty. It led me to wonder what will happen if the Bill does not pass. The number of MPs will be reduced by 50, which will mean fewer MPs to scrutinise Government legislation.

However, I also remembered that there are people in the other House who will be able to hold the Government to account. They are the Bishop of Birmingham, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Carlisle, the Bishop of Chelmsford, the Bishop of Chester, the Bishop of Chichester, the Bishop of Coventry, the Bishop of Derby, the Bishop of Durham, the Bishop of Ely, the Bishop of Leeds, the Bishop of Lincoln, the Bishop of Norwich, the Bishop of Oxford, the Bishop of Peterborough, the Bishop of Portsmouth—this looks very much like a stag do with the amount of guys here—the Bishop of Rochester, the Bishop of St Albans, the Bishop of Salisbury, the Bishop of Southwark, the Bishop of Winchester, the Bishop of Worcester, the Archbishop of York, the Bishop of Gloucester and the Bishop of Newcastle.

There is also Lord Agnew of Oulton, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom, the Earl of Arran, Lord Ashton of Hyde, Viscount Astor, Lord Astor of Hever, Earl Atlee, Lord Baker of Dorking, Lord Balfe, Lord Bamford, Lord Barker of Battle—

**The Chair:** Order. It is not appropriate to read from a list in Committee.

**David Linden:** But these are fine legislators.

**The Chair:** Please make a substantive contribution. Reading from a list is not allowed.

**David Linden:** This is not a list. These are some of our fantastic legislators. I could read it in a different order, not necessarily from a list; I could take names at random.

There is a whole 800 or 900 of them—the House of Lords is practically the size of the National People’s Congress in China.

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith):** GCSE maths. This is not about—

**David Linden:** At least we have heard something from the Minister. I feel gratified that I have managed to move the Minister to say something in Committee after her coming here week after week.

**Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab):** The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Lord Bishop of Chester. Is he aware that I was with the bishop on Sunday afternoon to open to the new community centre at St Mary’s church in Handbridge in Chester?

**David Linden:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Perhaps he might be able to tell us what happened that day and what the bishop said to him?

**Christian Matheson:** It was a fantastic occasion on which the community came together to dedicate the new church building, which will serve large parts of the community in Handbridge and the southern part of the city of Chester.

**David Linden:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for enlightening us about that.

**The Chair:** Mr Linden, as this is now a matter of public record, could you let me know whether those names on the list you are reading from support the Bill.

**David Linden:** That is a good question. Unfortunately, as a Member of the House of Commons, I have no opportunity to scrutinise lords, because they are, of course, unelected.

**Christian Matheson:** I suggest to my good friend the hon. Gentleman that we will not know whether their lordships support the Bill until it reaches them. A great way to test that would be for the Bill to complete its passage in this place and to move on to the other place, so that their lordships can have their say.

**David Linden:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that powerful intervention. He reminds us that, until such a time that the Government have the balls to bring forward a money resolution and allow the Bill to be considered clause by clause, line by line by the Committee, we will not have the opportunity to send it to our comrades in ermine along the corridor for them to scrutinise. It may well be, as the hon. Gentleman said—

**The Chair:** Order. Are you aware that the motion that we are discussing today is to adjourn?

**David Linden:** I am. I have seen that motion, I think, five times now, because I have been here for about five weeks in a row. I am very familiar with it.

**The Chair:** Then perhaps you could explain why you are giving the speech that you are, because it is not to the motion.

**David Linden:** Because the motion itself, and the proceedings of the Committee, are an absolute charade.

**Christian Matheson:** What a great pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I will again make the announcement that I made to the Committee last week, which is that I have taken the place of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), who I am very pleased to say is on maternity leave. I am sure that Committee members continue to send her and her husband all the best.

I will not make such a long speech as my good friend the hon. Member for Glasgow East, but I express my regret that we are in the same position as we have been in for the last five weeks. I have not, of course; I am only a fairly new addition to the Committee so I have not had to go through the proceedings and processes quite as tortuously, but it is a matter of regret that we are not able to debate the Bill in detail, because the Government still refuse to bring forward a money resolution. Indeed, there seems to be a distinct lack of interest on the Government Benches in the Committee. However, it is good to see the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean in his place. I understand he has been an assiduous attender, and I respect that. It is good to see him here taking the Bill seriously.

I do not want to detain the Committee too long on a fruitless exercise. I simply want to ask the Minister whether she will take back—or has already taken back—to ministerial colleagues a sense of Members’ frustration at the lack of progress. Will she explain that after a clear decision on Second Reading there is, certainly among the Opposition, anxiety, disappointment and—dare I say it—something approaching anger? There is a sense of a certain contempt in the way the Bill is not being dealt with.

I respect the Minister for taking one for the team in this respect: she has to go through the process, and this is not about the hon. Lady herself. She is very well thought of. It is about the Government as a whole not taking their responsibility to the House seriously. I ask the Minister to take back to her colleagues the idea that they cannot keep kicking the matter into the long grass forever, and that at some point the Bill will have to be debated.

**Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con):** It is good to see you in the Chair this week, Ms Dorries. I shall keep my remarks brief and, I hope, orderly.

I want to correct a factual point made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton. He said that the House of Commons did not support the instructions given to the boundary commissions for the current review. He is shaking his head, but I think that that is what he said. The House of Commons of course agreed the detailed rules setting out the current boundary review. I think it is important to acknowledge that.

**Afzal Khan:** What I was trying to say was that the current situation is that there is not support.

**Mr Harper:** The point is it should not be a surprise to the hon. Gentleman that the Committee cannot make progress on the Bill and that there is a motion to adjourn, because as the Minister explained in an earlier sitting—and I have said on a number of occasions—the Government position is clear. There is a boundary review under way. Under the relevant legislation the boundary commissions must produce reports for this Parliament between September and October. The Government have said that they want the Boundary Commission to be able to complete its work, which it has undertaken at considerable public expense.

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I have heard that point made a number of times by the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members. Does he accept that it is a good argument for not supporting a money resolution, but not for not tabling one?

**Mr Harper:** I think it is a good argument for not proceeding with the Bill at this point. The Government have made it clear that they do not want to proceed with it at this point. They will keep the matter open and both the Minister in Committee and the Leader of the House in the Chamber have made it clear that when the boundary commissions have brought forward their reports and Parliament has had a chance to consider them the Government will reflect on the position and make a decision on whether to bring forward a money resolution.

I think that that is a sensible position. Having listened carefully to what the Minister and the Leader of the House have said previously, I think that it will not change. I will continue to attend the Committee—and I acknowledge what the hon. Member for City of Chester said about that—so that we can debate the motion to adjourn. If at some point we debate the Bill in detail, I look forward to doing that, since it will amend the legislation that I had the pleasure of taking through the House when I was a Minister.

**Afzal Khan:** I do not understand what we lose if Parliament has a choice. It is clear that even if we were debating the Bill it would not pass tomorrow—there is a long process. If we have the review and the Bill as well, Members will have a choice.

9.45 am

**Mr Harper:** It is about making a decision. The Government have made a decision that it is sensible to allow the boundary commissions to complete a review, which they have almost done, at considerable public expense. They have consulted not just Members of Parliament and political parties but thousands of members of the public, who have looked at the initial drafts. They listened, responded to that and have made amendments. The Government wish that process, which has taken place at considerable public expense, to conclude before they reflect on whether it is sensible to proceed with the hon. Gentleman's Bill.

That is a perfectly sensible decision. I accept that he and his hon. Friends do not agree with that, but it is perfectly rational and defensible. That is why we have the motion to adjourn before us, and I think we will have such motions for considerable weeks until the boundary commissions have had a chance to report. It is a perfectly sensible decision, set out clearly by the Minister at earlier stages of the Committee.

**David Linden:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Harper:** No, I will conclude my remarks. Thank you for your indulgence, Ms Dorries.

*Question put and agreed to.*

9.46 am

*Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 20 June 2018 at half-past Nine o'clock.*



