



LOOKING BACK OVER THE YEAR

The old adage that a week is a long time in politics has been proven beyond doubt this last month or so. The unexpected Brexit result, the resignation of the Prime Minister and the appointment of a new one, without the need for the party faithful to have their say, the resignation of the UKIP leader, Nigel Farage, the refusal of the Labour leader to quit despite pressure from all sides and the subsequent challenge for the Labour leadership has all taken place within a few weeks. If that is not enough - there has been the appointment of a new cabinet and ministerial team and the resignation of most of Labour's front bench. And of course over the last week, the shocking events in Nice and an attempted coup in Turkey, both of which poses worrying questions for the future.

As we approach the holiday month of August, it's time for a break for us all and some quiet time to reflect.

So much has happened that I can barely remember my first few weeks in Parliament, learning the ropes, fearful of breaking one of our century old traditions, the nerves and the laughter, the highs and the lows but, as I was on my first day in Parliament, I remain honoured to represent the people of Thirsk and Malton and as determined as ever to do my very best for all of you.

One of the hardest lessons I have learnt as an MP is that it is impossible to please all my constituents all the time. The debate over the rights and wrongs of fracking or over whether we stay in or leave the EU are both obvious cases in point.

I have always said that shale gas exploration makes sense in principle; if we were importing cars or steel we would be saying that we should be making our own, but we are importing much of our gas supplies so it does make sense to produce our own if we can. However, we need to be able to demonstrate that our water, our views and our house prices are not affected. I set up the APPG for Shale Gas Regulation and Planning in April to recommend an effective regulation and planning regime if fracking goes ahead and intend to make sure that no stone is left unturned to ensure that it is properly regulated and monitored from start to finish. We also need to make sure that the number of well sites are minimised and kept away from villages and towns. Following concerted efforts to clarify the position, Ineos, who hold gas exploration licences, have written to us approximating 10 well sites per 100 square kilometres, which I hope will offer reassurance to those who are worried about the effect it will have on our beautiful countryside and on the peace and tranquillity of rural life.

A recent Climate Change Committee report on the compatibility of shale gas with our commitments to tackle climate change made clear that fracking on a significant scale is not compatible with our climate targets unless three tests are met. They include the tight regulation of emissions and monitoring to ensure rapid response to leaks; assurances that UK shale gas production will replace imported gas rather than increasing domestic consumption; and additional production emissions from shale gas wells must be offset through reductions elsewhere. If it is clear that exploration cannot be carried out whilst staying inside acceptable environmental limits then I will call for a moratorium.

Throughout the EU referendum campaign I was clear that I thought it was in the UK's best interests if we stayed within the EU and, in particular, within the Single Market. However the constituency voted in line with the country and a majority, by a few percent, voted to leave. I respect this result and now we must all work together to make it happen in the best interests of the country. It was a long and difficult campaign and the tone, on both sides, was not always as it should have been. In many cases it caused divisions between families and friends, colleagues and communities. There is no going back and no question of a second referendum or it being over-turned in Parliament. However, I will do what I can to press the government for the best possible deal for the UK, particularly for businesses, upon which the country's prosperity relies.

So there are plenty of challenges in the months ahead. There is one more which we must not forget. Here in Yorkshire we need the devolution deal that ten other regions are already enjoying. North, West and East Yorkshire is home to six and a half million people and whilst the successful regions are able to make decisions themselves (without having to ask permission of central government) and have secured funding to support these decisions, we have are missing out. Take our neighbours in Manchester, for example, they have responsibility for a devolved and consolidated transport budget, £36.5 million funding allocation over 30 years to drive growth, £300 million Housing Investment Fund over 10 years, monies for apprenticeships and skills, an ability to retain 100% of business rates from next year and devolved powers over £6billion for NHS and social care budgets.

The divide between the North and the South gets wider as each year goes by. Annual per person spending in London stands around £800 whilst in the regions we are given £300. We need massive investment in roads, rail, housing, businesses and skills. It is time that the North got a fair deal and this will continue to be one of my top priorities.

I am delighted that Theresa May has become our second woman Prime Minister. I voted for her in the parliamentary party elections because I thought she was head and shoulders the best candidate. She has the experience of six years in one of the toughest government jobs in the Home Office, she is tough and hard-working and I believe she will do a great job in steering us through these challenging times. She has chosen her cabinet wisely and is surrounded by very able people and a mix of Leave and Remain ministers which will, as she intends, help reunite the party after four bruising months.

Following the reshuffle, I am delighted to inform you that I have been appointed Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) to the Leader of the House of Commons, the Rt. Hon. David Lidington MP. A PPS is appointed by a minister to be his or her assistant and the 'eyes and ears' of the minister in the House of Commons. Of course, this will not prevent me making my views known where I believe the government needs to think again, as I did on the proposed Local Government Settlement, the sale of the Land Registry and Supported Housing.

Finally, our thoughts will remain with the many innocent victims, their friends and their families, of the recent atrocities in Nice and Munich. We will always stand alongside our friends in Europe and pledge our unequivocal support to help defeat these stone-age, power hungry cowards. We must also thank our own security services for their commitment, expertise and professionalism to help keep us safe.

Thank you for all your support. I wish you a wonderful, English, sun-soaked summer.