



News from Westminster

February 8th 2007 Christine Russell MP

Labour: the future for Britain



This week the Prime Minister appeared in front of the Liaison committee. This committee draws its members from every Commons select committee from Home Affairs to Culture and Sport. Its well worth watching as the Prime Minister usually uses it to talk about what our Labour Government is doing about the challenges facing the country.

This week was no different. The PM went through a lot of policy ideas that Labour is looking at including climate change and tackling crime and anti-social behaviour.

I was pleased with what the PM said on crime. Labour has introduced tougher sentencing and put more police on the streets. And the PM made clear that the task in tackling crime was to target the offender and not just the offence, to improve public confidence in non custodial sentences and to extend community payback schemes where criminals put something back into the community that they have harmed with their crimes.

This could be anything from cleaning up graffiti to building a new set of swings.

The PM said that although Britain is a leader in the climate change debate and had reduced its greenhouse gas emissions significantly, we still need to do more. He also said that the Climate Change Bill, which will be coming to Parliament in the coming months, would outline a more rigorous approach to reducing CO2 emissions.

We are looking at plans to enable people to see and measure their own "carbon footprint", and how they reduce it. This debate isn't about stopping people flying, but about saving energy in homes, recycling more and investing in science and technology. He said that he believed that Nuclear energy would continue to be part of the energy mix in the future.

Clearly in 1997 most of the issues the UK faced were domestic, like unemployment, saving the NHS and improving schools. Now the challenges are different. We face climate change, energy security, migration, terrorism, international crime, cohesion and skills of workers in a global economy.

As the Tories have discovered to their cost that in election after election, the public doesn't respect a party that won't face the challenges and won't take decisions. Their own policy review has sadly opted for grandstanding, rather than addressing these big issues facing the country.

By contrast the Government policy review and the National Policy Forum process provides a unified platform for Labour to move forward together to that next era.

So all in all an interesting look ahead to the coming months at Westminster.

I'll make sure I keep you up to date on what's happening.

Love your lungs, give up smoking!

I can remember when smoking was common on public transport, on planes, in most offices and in cinemas.

These places are better today, now they're smoke-free. So I am delighted that from 1 July this year all public places will be smoke-free.

Every year people in Chester die from diseases like lung cancer – life expectancy for long term smokers in Chester is on average about a decade shorter than a non-smoker.

Medical evidence increasingly shows that second hand smoke is a major health risk for workers and friends of smokers. It's not fair that many people have to face that health risk

just by turning up to work.

This is why a year ago, on 14 February, I was proud to be part of a Government that voted to stop this and to make Chester smoke free.

I think these changes will make Chester healthier and reduce the risks of disease for local people.

Most smokers say they want to stop smoking and most smokers support measures that will help them not to smoke.

So love your lungs - give up smoking today. If you want help call the NHS Smokefree helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Lib Dems: Soft on crime

Labour has taken tough measures to crack down on crime and anti-social behaviour. But the Lib Dems have repeatedly tried to block these measures and would deprive the police and local authorities of the powers to take on the vandals and the bullies.

They have opposed our tough action on the yobs who are blighting the lives of hard-working families.

The Lib Dems are:

- Against using Labour's powers to break up teen gangs.
- Opposed to sending young teen criminals to court
- Oppose jail sentences for drug possession; would legalise the sale of cannabis and not penalize those who grow it
- Opposed to the retention of DNA records which are helping crack old crimes and convict dangerous offenders

If it were down to the Lib Dems, the police would not have the power to disperse gangs of youths, impose Anti-Social Behaviour Orders on the worst offenders, and give curfews to people causing trouble late at night.

The truth is the Lib Dems are more interested in protecting the rights of teen gangs and yobs than protecting the decent law-abiding people who are threatened by them.

1/3 funding boost for new buildings and equipment in Chester's hospitals

Labour has announced details of £382 million of capital funding for Primary Care Trusts for the next financial year.

This money represents a 30% increase from last year and the extra cash will be used to buy and modernise buildings, get more equipment and land needed for expanding hospitals.

West Cheshire PCT will see an increase in operational capital from £399,000 to £497,000 in 2007-2008.

We are making huge changes to the NHS, reforming the system and providing more convenient care, closer to patients' homes. This funding will mean that patients in Chester will have better facilities and access to more sophisticated equipment.

This will benefit the community for years to come.

By 2008 Labour wants no patients to have to wait for longer than 18 weeks from referral to treatment. This money will get us on the way to achieving that.

Compare this to the Tories who left the NHS to rot and took money away from it year after year.