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Thursday 28th July 2016

Hello again

It certainly has been an unprecedented time on the political front. I am sure future generations will study this period in political history, dissecting its every details and coming up with a myriad theories. And certainly there will be no shortage of material! I can't quite believe I have been right there in the midst of it all and how quickly the political scene can change.

In the space of one month, through the process of our democracy, the people voted to leave the European Union, the Prime Minister, David Cameron resigned, a leadership contest followed, MPs voted in two ballots, an unprecedented two female candidates remained – the relatively new Energy Minister, Andrea Leadsom, and Home Secretary Theresa May; Andrea Leadsom stepped down when it was clear May had the lion's share of support from MPs and within a very short space of time the remaining candidate, Theresa May became the new Prime Minister avoiding a summer long campaign going out to the members. In another landmark occurrence we now have only the second woman ever to become Prime Minister in the UK. It really has been a whirlwind!

That said I firmly believe that in Theresa May we are in a very safe pair of hands. Illustrating her experience (the second longest serving Home Secretary), determination and clear thinking the new Prime Minister moved quickly to establish a new cabinet and new departments (International Trade and Brexit

and amalgamating Energy with Business) and is establishing a much needed sense of stability which I appreciate is so imperative for business in Taunton Deane. Work is underway to give signals of reassurance to businesses here and international investors that the UK is open for trade.

We have a sound base from which to build, where 2 ½ million jobs have been created in the last 6 years, the deficit has been reduced by 2/3 and some of the major banks have been recapitalised all of which have left the economy in a stronger position than in 2010.

Agriculture and the Countryside

I have been engaging with farming and environmental groups to discuss the future of this beautiful and productive countryside. It is imperative that rural areas like this one are not penalised in the post EU world. 40% of the EU budget was devoted to supporting rural areas, the environment and agriculture and a suitable framework or support must be put in place for them to continue to thrive and to protect biodiversity and landscapes.

I attended a productive on farm meeting locally with farmers and specialists working in the agri-environment sector including to consider options for the way forward. A strong sense is coming across from some sectors that future rural support might be linked more closely to delivery of public goods and services (this would include everything we demand from our land from food production to access, water management, flood control, habitat management.) I am feeding ideas in to the new Secretary of State at Defra, Andrea Leadsom (with whom I worked closely in the Energy department.) Related organisations, from wildlife bodies to the NFU and the Conservative Rural Affairs Group are all working on suggestions. If anyone else has considered ideas I'm happy to pass on to the right channels. Also working with the Conservative Environment Network I am urging the Prime Minister to take swift steps to adopt the major European

legislation which protects our precious environment (Habitats, Wild birds and Bath Water Directive and marine protection) with a view to amending as necessary later.

Pow Presents Petition

I was delighted to present my petition to the House of Commons calling for the restoration of the much loved Wellington Monument, the iconic landmark located in the Blackdown Hills and visible from far and wide. I was overwhelmed by the enormous support for the petition with over 1500 people personally signing it. This kind of support helps in making the strongest case to government and potential funders for a restoration project. The National Trust has spent a year doing detailed survey work to assess the structure, coming up with a range of repair options and I'm in discussion with them about future plans. I'll keep you posted!



Grist was added to the mill when the Duke of Wellington himself got in touch having seen the related monument publicity and he too signed the petition. The tangible link with the past which the current Duke (9th Duke of Wellington) represents was really brought home to me when he took me to the Long Gallery in the House of Lords and we posed for a photo beneath the gigantic painting of his ancestor, the Iron Duke himself (the First Duke) fighting in the Battle of Waterloo. The Monument commemorates the Duke, one of our 3 greatest war heroes, and his success at

the battle. The obelisk (the tallest 3-D structure of its kind in the world) was finished in 1817, so its 200th anniversary will be next year.



Positive Prospects

Fortunately Taunton Deane maintains its record for relatively low unemployment. For some of those struggling to get into the working world, usually for a range of reasons companies like Prospects, with a base in Taunton High Street are doing positive work largely helping the long term unemployed get jobs, largely based around a range of ingenious schemes for confidence building and training. The idea of the event was to highlight successes and share best practise with others in the region.

Diversity is the spice of Life.

Being your local MP really is a diverse activity, here are just a few of my recent engagements:

- speaking at the Ancient Tree Forum in Dorset (as Chair of the All Party Ancient Woodland Group)

- speaking in a debate about the shocking activity of dog fighting (as Chair of the All Party Group on Animal Welfare) and with the same hat on I took part in the BBC's Victoria Derbyshire Show talking about the equally unacceptable trade linked to the eating of dog meat in Asia.
- attending the moving retirement farewell service in honour of the wonderful Archdeacon of Taunton John Reid in St Mary Magdalene church, Taunton.
- meeting a local constituent in Westminster at a special Diabetes event – she was doing excellent voluntary work helping people learn to live successfully with the demands of this disease (our own Prime Minister is a great example to fellow sufferers.)
- speaking in a Westminster Hall debate on electric cars (if we are to increase uptake of this pollution friendly method of transport we need electric charging points to be installed in Taunton Deane as the only charging point currently available is at Hestercombe.)
- speaking in the first and second readings of the Higher Education and New Universities Bill with special reference to the proposed University for Somerset which I am pushing forward in conjunction with interested parties at the newly amalgamated Bridgwater and Somerset Colleges and Somerset County Council
- sitting on the Environmental Audit Select Committee inquiry into plastic microbeads. I urge everyone to look closely at the cosmetic products, shower gels, shampoos, toothpaste and cleaning products they use and try to choose products that do not contain these tiny beads of plastic. With every shower up to 100,000 microbeads can be washed down the drain and these are not removed by the water companies so they end up in the ocean where they are ingested by fish and are changing the marine habitat. Beware oysters – each oyster you eat may contain as many as 50 micro

beads! The inquiry reports back shortly and amongst other things we are likely to recommend a ban on microbeads in cosmetics as a starting point for combating this pollution.

To follow the inquiry click [HERE](#).

- I was delighted to unveil a plaque on a tree in Langford Budville to commemorate the queen's 90 birthday
- I had an informative morning in Wiveliscombe launching the new Wiveliscombe Guide – a leaflet showcasing local business, catering and accommodation outlets. I followed this with a discussion on the needs of the local business community.

Productivity

Time will undoubtedly be challenging in our brave new post EU world and so I am continuing to lobby the relevant Ministers on securing funding for the range of infrastructure projects I've been working on with stake holders including the A358 upgrade. It is more essential than ever that these key projects come to fruition as they will not only improve the lives of locals but also play a part in making the area the best place to do business which in turn will reflect on the local economy.



Pow's Parliamentary Tours

Book a Visit: Finally I am always delighted to welcome groups to visit Westminster. Amongst those coming recently have been Queens College and Richard Huish politics students and the Stoke St Mary History Society accompanied by Tom Mayberry, Chief Exec of the SW Heritage Trust based in Taunton. The latter group visited on the very day our new Prime Minister was

declared, making it a very pertinent day indeed for the History Society to descend on Parliament.



I am considering booking a

coach for a Pow's Parliamentary trip in the late autumn at approximately £20/head to cover costs. If you are interested in booking a seat please contact my office.

By the way, I am proud to have been made an RSPB Snipe Champion to help highlight the need to protect species like this. I enjoyed a visit to West Sedgemoor Nature Reserve to see the right habitat management can create areas where these birds will thrive. And yes, I did actually spot a couple of these diminutive birds! There are now more breeding pairs here than anywhere in the South West.

See the video of my recent visit to Dewlands Farm [HERE](#).

Hot Off the Press

Oh, and by the way, I have just been asked to become the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the new Housing and Planning Minister, Gavin Barwell. I'll be getting stuck in to this additional role once we return from the summer recesses.

In the meantime have a happy summer,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca', followed by a large, stylized flourish that resembles a large 'R' or a similar letter.

Rebecca

Ps. I am carrying out a survey to gauge views relating to the transformation of Taunton Railway Station, please take part and let me know your opinions [HERE](#).