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Rebecca Pow's E-bulletin

Tuesday 21 June 2016

Hello again from Westminster and Taunton

I write following turbulent and sad times. To have been in Parliament at a time when one of my new colleagues has been murdered is tragic beyond words. Just two weeks before her death I had volunteered to be in the House of Commons Tug of War Team raising funds at an evening event for Macmillan and this was where I met Jo personally for the first time. Being both on the smallish side we were put as no 1 and no 2 – pulling together at the front. Jo and I instantly hit it off, laughing and sharing views on the challenges of juggling our new parliamentary demands with family life as well as discovering that we were both passionate about representing our own home areas in Parliament.

We didn't win at the Tug-of-War (although the event raised over £100,000) but vowed we would be much better if we practised for next time and Jo volunteered to be our captain. Well, what a difference a few days make. Now we will never be pulling together again with Jo. I'd like to think that all she stands for will live on and that we will carry a little bit of Jo's overwhelmingly good things with us: absolute dedication to her constituency and the desire to immerse herself in public life, humanity driven by a cause to better the lives of ordinary people, love of her family and a joy of life itself.



If you would like to donate to the charity's set up in memory of Jo Cox please click [here](#).

PS. I am simply overcome by all the utterly lovely emails filled with condolences and kind wishes from people of every party supporting me in my work as your MP, so thank you I really do appreciate it.

EU Referendum

Just a gentle reminder, although I am sure no one needs it. Do use your vote on Thursday in the historic EU referendum. This could be the most important political decision of our lifetimes and will affect our younger generations for decades to come.

There was an excellent turnout for the IN/OUT debate I hosted at the Brewhouse recently with a fine line up of guests who all gave of their time voluntarily to help provide some clarity for those still making up their minds.

As you will know after long deliberations and speaking to individuals and businesses across the constituency I have decided that we are safer, more secure, better environmentally and more prosperous remaining in this huge trading block of 500 million people. It's not perfect and needs changing but better to do this at the table. Read my reasons for voting to remain [HERE](#).



However, we each have one vote and there are sound points on either side of the argument. So please rest assured that whatever the result on Thursday I shall remain your hard working MP, pushing to make Taunton Deane the best possible place it can be.

Excellent Environment Forum

I was delighted with the great turn out and lively debate at the launch of my new Environment Forum. This could have had something to do with the star attraction Stanley Johnson (yes, dad of Boris) talking about his work as an international conservationist and working on environmental policy in Europe.

I am already looking forward to the next forum.

If you would like notification of the next Environmental Forum please email me on rebecca.pow.mp@parliament.uk.

There is no shortage of subjects for discussion – ideas welcome too!



Highlights

As always I balance work in London with that in the constituency and I am grateful for some bursts of recent sunshine which make the long hours much more pleasant.

Recent local highlights include a visit to the thriving North Town School to see how the academy system is operating successfully. I was especially taken with the working garden which is used for so many different lessons (it's not just about vegetables!)

Informative too was a morning meeting the long-term unemployed at Prospects, in Taunton. This business helps many of those who believed they had no hope of getting into work. It's an inspiring model, giving people training and confidence and is part of the drive to get people off benefits and into work.



In Wellington I opened the buzzing Street Fair, a fun event raising precious funds to put towards the carnival enabling it to raise further valuable funds for charity. Also in Wellington I had a lively exchange at the Business Association and a fascinating visit to Pritex, the high tech company specialising in sound proofing for the motor trade. It's a good example of the diverse and expanding businesses in the constituency.

On Track

Still in Wellington I must applaud the wonderful show of support for the potential Wellington rail station project from Wellington Town Council. By committing £10,000 towards the next phase of the project the town is showing dedicated solidarity and this gives an important signal to other potential backers.

I am progressing matters with Rail Minister Claire Perry, Cllr Mark Edwards who is the Taunton Deane lead and a range of other key players and hope to have more of an update shortly.



And following meetings with all relevant parties I'm pleased to report that the upgrade of Taunton Railway station is chugging on full steam ahead. I'm also asking locals for their views on how they would like to see the area develop and bringing together locals to input into the wider Firepool development. I think it's important that people have their say about their town early rather than trying to back track with ideas and suggestions when it's too late. I'm heartened that GWR, Network Rail and Taunton Deane Council are open to views.

Do feed in ideas by email too and I'll pass them on.

Meeting Ministers

As our MP I have access to Ministers in all departments and I regularly meet them to raise issues on behalf of constituents and the area in general. Recently I've raised housing and planning issues and the new Neighbourhood Plan with the Department for Communities and Local Government Ministerial team and have been working closely with Pensions Minister, Baroness Altman, over potential relaxation of pension auto-enrolment for seasonal workers on local fruit and veg farms.

Monument Progress

Very many thanks to all those who have signed my petition calling for the restoration of the iconic Wellington Monument, the tallest three sided obelisk in the world and a testament to one of our greatest war heroes, the Duke of Wellington. I'm working with the National Trust on the feasibility of restoring the Monument and fund raising opportunities. Demonstrating that there is enormous public support for the project is essential in proving to potential funders that this is a worthy cause. I plan to present the petition to Parliament before the summer recesses.

If you would like a copy of the petition to sign please email **rebecca.pow.mp@parliament.uk** or drop into my constituency office: **Mason House, Magdalene Street, Taunton, TA1 1SG.**

Queens Speech

Since my last update to you we have had the annual State Opening of Parliament. It truly is a great tradition and a wonderful spectacle, but more importantly sets out the Government business for the year. The 2016 Queens Speech set out a forward thinking, reforming agenda and I look forward to scrutinising the upcoming legislation in the year ahead.

I spoke during the education debate following the Queens Speech making particular reference to the Higher Education and Research Bill that will make it easier for new universities to be created. This is highly relevant to Taunton Deane where I'm working with key stakeholders, including the Leader of Somerset Council, John Osman, for a university to be established. This would help to address a serious skills gap in the county and enable us to retain many of our young people I have already had meetings with the Universities Minister, Jo Johnson, on this and with the recent merger of Somerset College with Bridgwater College I look forward to moving this forward.

Committee Business

As well as speaking in the Chamber I am busy on two select committees. Both the EFRA and Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) are cross-party and do important work by scrutinising the Government and making recommendations through reports and enquiries.

The EAC has recently published the findings of its Soil Health inquiry. It may not sound sexy, but healthy soil is essential to health food production, flood control, biodiversity, carbon storage. Our inquiry revealed that our soils are being eroded at an alarming rate and that much agricultural land could be unproductive within a generation,

A copy of the final publication can be found [here](#).

Both committees have also been conducting flooding inquiries, through taking evidence with the aim of submitting recommendations to the Government about how to better handle excessive natural flood events in the future. I have been encouraged to see the special emphasis placed on a wider catchment approach to our land use.

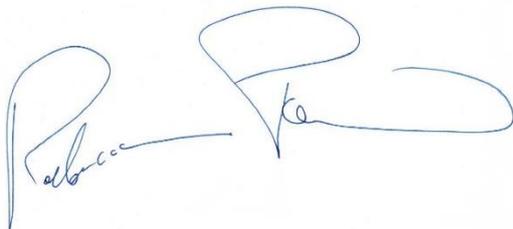
If you are interested the EAC report can be found [here](#).

I'm also on the inquiry looking into the harmful effects of micro plastics, which are tiny particles that are found in cosmetics, shower gels, toothpastes, and cleaning products. These are too small to be filtered out through water systems and are washing into the ocean and affecting our fish and marine habitats. For more information on this important issue please see my website (www.rebeccapow.org.uk).

By the way, I am delighted to have been made a Snipe champion by the RSPB. It is an incredibly rare bird and I will be going on a foray to see it shortly. And also congratulations to Somerset Cricket Club for some great results. The club is a vital part of the Taunton economy, attracting people to the town and benefiting many businesses. And finally I'm delighted to support ArtsTaunton, working to up the cultural offer of our county town and the rest of the area too.

As always, please do contact me if you think I can be of any assistance with anything and please join me in a silent prayer to Jo Cox.

As always, please contact my office if you require any assistance on 01823 443062.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Rebecca