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**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR GOSPORT
LEE ON THE SOLENT • STUBBINGTON • HILL HEAD**



MARCH 25 | ISSUE 164

As March comes to an end, Spring has definitely sprung and the clocks have sprung forward too. Meanwhile there have been so many developments and announcements in Parliament this month, I'm going to kick off this newsletter with a quick run-down on what's changed and what this might mean for you.

Spring Statement: Chancellor Rachel Reeves presented her economic outlook (which, we are told, certainly wasn't an emergency Budget!) With inflation up, unemployment rising, and growth predictions halved, the Government is having a difficult time convincing the public and the Office for Budget Responsibility that the forecast is as sunny as the weather. I spoke to ITV News Meridian to discuss how the Chancellor is trying to balance the books by introducing knee-jerk benefit cuts. You can watch my exchange [here](#).

Liz Kendall's Pathways To Work Reform: The Work and Pensions Secretary announced welfare reforms that includes tightening eligibility for Personal Independence Payment (PIP). The system is certainly not working as well as it should, while the number on out-of-work benefits fell significantly over recent years, disability and sickness claimants have risen rapidly since the Pandemic and the bill will hit £100BN a year by 2029 if left unchecked. However, the Government's response to the issue seems contradictory. Getting people back to work needs jobs – jobs that are being cut by the destructive hike in Employer National Insurance Contributions introduced at the Autumn Budget. No doubt the most vulnerable will suffer under this Jobs Tax. I spoke about it in the Chamber – listen [here](#).

Tobacco and Vapes Bill: Parliament voted on this legislation last week. It prohibits the sale of tobacco to younger generations, specifically, those born on/after 1st January 2009. I brought forward an amendment to the Bill, asking to ban the use of plastic in cigarette filters. Considering there are the equivalent of two straws of plastic in one cigarette butt, the proposal is a no-brainer that would improve the environment by clearing up our beaches, streets & waterways. The measure was supported by Conservatives, Lib Dem, Green and Reform MPs, and I was disappointed to see that only Labour seem to disagree with such an obvious and easy solution. My speech is available [here](#).

National Insurance Contributions (Secondary Class 1 Contributions) Bill: These are due to come into effect from April 6th and I spoke in support of amendments to the Bill that would exempt care homes, early years settings,

charities and healthcare settings including hospices and children's hospices from these tax rises. I have been contacted by so many organisations that support vulnerable people in our area who are worried about their financial outlook for the coming months. You can read exactly what I said [here](#), but suffice to say I'm not happy with the Government's choices.

Away from the House of Commons Chamber, the Culture, Media, and Sport Committee that I Chair has been very active. Chairman of the BBC, Dr Samir Shah, and Director-General Tim Davie, appeared before us, and with the BBC soon to begin the process of renewing its Charter, serious and important questions were aimed at the pair. You can read a transcript of that session [here](#), and watch one of my questions [here](#).

Last week we kicked off the Oral Evidence component of our inquiry into Community and Grassroots Sport.

I was also pleased to welcome Olympic gold medallist Emily Campbell to my Westminster office to talk about the campaign she is running with ukactive promoting the physical and mental health benefits of doing strengthening activities twice a week.



I was delighted to see our Gosport community champion, Les Heyhoe, in Parliament as a nominee at the PubAid Community Hero Awards.

While Les was not the ultimate winner, he made the final 3 out of 761 entrants. An incredible achievement.

Back at home, Les also hosted his annual 'horse race' at HMS Sultan in support of local good causes, I was delighted to join the fundraising fun.

This month saw the first meeting of the Children and Young People Cancer Taskforce since it was reformed. I will be leading the Patient Experience workstream and will be joined by Stubbington's Charlotte Fairall from Sophie's Legacy. We hope to make rapid progress and will keep you posted.

For International Women's Day I was privileged to represent the UK Parliament at the 69th Conference on the Commission on the Status of Women in New York. 30 years on from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a landmark document for women's rights and gender equality, we appear to have made little progress. The Conference was a reminder that gender equality is hard won and easily lost. We discussed these challenges with Parliamentarians, activists and organisations from around the world, and also spent some time with the delegation from Canada, who are facing the new geo-political reality with great energy and determination.



Back home in the Gosport Constituency I hosted some important visitors throughout the month.



Dr Nick Merriman, the CEO of English Heritage, came to meet me at Fort Brockhurst and agreed that the site had huge potential for our area. We're committed to transforming this historic fortress into an even bigger part of Gosport's community and tourism offering. The first practical step will be exploring the conversion of part of the Fort into an artist and creator studio complex.

We would also like to see it playing a greater role in developing arts and crafts skills, potentially bringing in small and medium enterprises to support the future vision while preserving important historical craftsmanship.

I was happy to welcome Dr Tasha Ebanks-Garcia, the Cayman Islands Representative to the UK, to the Gosport peninsula. I showed her the work being done at the Rum Store in Royal Clarence Yard, and we discussed potential for overseas investment in this site as part of the Levelling Up funded regeneration of this stunning heritage building.

I would dearly love to see a rum distillery as part of the redevelopment, linking smartly with its original purpose and offering a great tourist attraction! Reconstruction will start in August.

I visited Fort Gilkicker alongside Gosport Borough Council, Historic England and Sustainable Conservation Trust to see how the re-development of this complex historic site is coming along.



There were also some other updates on other important local projects. I met the latest Immigration Minister, Angela Eagle, to seek reassurance that local people would be consulted at every step of the process to reopen Haslar Immigration Removal Centre.

I met with the Managing Director of the Gosport Ferry to discuss the 3.9% price rise which comes in on 2nd April. While inflation has been falling over the last couple of years, it has started to tick up again and the increase to Employers National Insurance Contributions (as mentioned above) means they are unable to keep prices the same.

We also discussed the recent closure of the night-ferry. I told them that I will be hosting a summit on water taxi services in the region and have invited them to join this important event.

On a more positive note, I was extremely happy to see the unpopular proposals for Stubbington Study Centre rejected by Hampshire County Council's Conservative Cabinet. This is a great example of the power that our community has in bringing meaningful change. Well done to everyone who took part in the consultation, signed the petition and marched the streets to save our site!

I met lots of our very talented young people this month. Both teams from Bay House School won the area finals of the Rotary Youth Speaks competition and went on to take first and second place in the District Finals. I was very pleased to invite them to Westminster to celebrate their achievement.



I also welcomed the brilliant winner of my Christmas card competition, Emilia Shaw from Gomer Junior School, together with her parents in Parliament for a tour and hot chocolate in the House of Lords!

I caught up with pupils at Alverstoke Junior School to discuss World Book Day and their Young Governors programme. Year 4 also had plenty of good questions for me about my work in Parliament, and what it was like to be an MP! I visited Bridgemary School to discuss their positive progress. And at Rowner Juniors I had a kickabout with some of the girls as part of England Football's #LetGirlsPlay campaign. You can find out more [here](#).



I was also extremely impressed on my visit to the [Natal Bean](#), a parent and baby drop-in at the Scout Hut in Stubbington. They offer the most wonderful welcome and support to those experiencing the joys and challenges of a new baby, as well as a welcome cuppa and delicious cakes!



It was a pleasure to cut the ribbon to open the new *Enterprise Rent-A-Car* branch in Gosport by the Brockhurst Roundabout. Their car-club enables you to rent a car, even by the hour, just via an app and their lovely team promise to help customers with any queries!

I spoke up in Parliament about several important causes. I highlighted the importance of tourism in our community and its role in increasing jobs and investment for English Tourism Week.

I mentioned that the UK's seaside and coastal areas like ours attract 15.2m domestic visitors annually, spending £4.4bn, as well as the strength of our heritage assets as a fantastic draw for tourists to our area.

Combined with our beautiful coastline our area is well-poised to capture more of this market.



I also spoke about saving our local news outlets. Whether it's Radio Solent or the Portsmouth News, the Daily Echo or ITV Meridian, local news is more trusted than national outlets and is a comfort to thousands of people in our area.

I faced a grilling from Peter Henley on BBC Politics South on everything from benefit cuts, house building, potholes to mobile phones in schools. You can watch the episode [here](#).

Lastly, big congratulations are in order for the inaugural champions of my Pub of the Year competition! Well done to Windsor Castle for securing victory in this very close vote. With more than 1600 votes submitted, we can clearly see what an important role local pubs play in our community and what overwhelming support they have!

So that's it for March! As ever, my team and I are here for any questions, thoughts or concerns you may have.

Please do get in touch via caroline.dinenage.mp@parliament.uk

Best wishes
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