

Good news you might have missed

This week we learned that unemployment is going down, more children from deprived backgrounds are going to university and the new M8 will open this month.

News story: £22.7 Million awarded to support older veterans

The money will help organisations across the country to continue the invaluable work they do to support older veterans, which includes providing access to health care and carers, support with using the internet, and offering general advice.

Defence Minister Mark Lancaster said:

Our veterans have given so much for their country, and the Aged Veterans Fund is a way of us thanking our older veterans and ensuring they are cared for in later life.

One of the awards, totalling almost £4 million, went to Poppyscotland who manage 14 projects under its Unforgotten Forces programme, which provides wellbeing improvements to homes, helps to prevent veterans from feeling isolated, and support to those who suffer hearing problems.

Mark Bibbey Chief Executive at Poppyscotland said:

We want people to understand that key organisations in the area of support provision have joined forces to provide a more holistic provision for aged veterans. If a veteran is engaged with one organisation, for example, they can immediately be referred to another – or multiple consortium members if required. The essence is strength in numbers and we want the identity of our consortium to reflect this.

Age UK received £4.4 million for its Joining Forces scheme, which gives up to 12 weeks of tailored support for older veterans across the country, providing information and advice, practical support at home, access to social events and digital technology, and opportunities to become more active.

Steve Hampson, Head of Innovation & Programmes at Age UK said:

Joining Forces allows us to build on the work we already do across the country with older veterans and to reach out to those who may need more support. The grant means we can develop and test our services, and learn more about how best to support older veterans to get more out of later life. Our work has at its core what older people want to achieve for themselves.

£4.8 million was awarded to the Legion Healthy Living Portfolio, led by The Royal British Legion, to promote healthy living through a number of ways including local activities, research to improve services, and the training of specialist staff.

Steve Baynes, Head of Grants and Social Policy at The Royal British Legion said:

This grant will help the Legion continue its work with a network of charities, supporting the Armed Forces community through thick and thin. In particular, the grant will enable us and our partners to focus on achieving lasting social change for aged veterans. The veterans to benefit will be from a range of communities, including those who are at risk of becoming socially isolated, struggling with their physical or mental health, with hearing loss or in residential care. Many of the projects will also benefit carers and family members of those who Served, and some are research-oriented so that we, as a society, are better informed of current and emerging needs.

The ten charities to receive the awards are Age UK, Poppyscotland, The Royal British Legion, the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association, Cornwall Rural Community Charity, Rural Action Yorkshire, St Johns and Red Cross Defence Medical Welfare Service, Age Cymru, Seafarers UK, and Hospice UK.

The Aged Veterans Fund which was set up in 2015, had a total of £30 million of LIBOR funds available to support older veterans.

It is designed to support non-core health, wellbeing, and social care needs for older veterans (born before 1 January 1950), including surviving Second World War veterans, those who undertook National Service, and other voluntary enlisted veterans who may need some focused support in relation to their health and social care needs.

This final round of awards comes after the Aged Veterans Fund initially granted £6.6 million to eight organisations in 2016.

Labour will make corporate tax returns public

LABOUR WILL MAKE CORPORATE TAX RETURNS PUBLIC

Nowhere to hide for tax dodgers as Labour will make giant corporations' tax returns public

The next Labour government will change company law to make sure the largest corporations publish their tax returns in full. Tax avoidance schemes rely on secrecy and complexity to enable tax dodgers to shirk their responsibilities.

By shining the spotlight on large company accounts, Labour will close the loopholes through which large corporations swindle the public.

The "tax gap" between the tax is collected and the tax expected is estimated by HMRC to stand at £36bn. Wealth hidden in tax havens worldwide is estimated at £13,000bn. Even a fraction of this amount paid as the fair taxes that are due would end austerity.

Labour will be tabling a series of amendments to the Finance Bill seeking to strengthen and widen the scope of anti-tax avoidance measures. The second reading of the Finance Bill will be Tuesday the 18th April 2017.

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell MP today said:

"Tax avoidance is a scourge on society that company secrecy laws help facilitate, and the Tories have done nothing to tackle. Labour will pour the disinfectant of sunlight on large company accounts, helping close down the loopholes and the scams that the tax dodgers rely on.

"The Tories are running a rigged economy for the super-rich and giant corporate tax dodgers. Only Labour will stand up for workers and small businesses to make our tax system fair and our public services like education and the NHS are protected."

Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury Peter Dowd MP today said:

"The measures in the Finance Bill claiming to close tax loopholes do not go far enough and have gaping omissions, another Tory conjuring trick to hide their inaction in making sure that everyone, including the rich, pays their fair share of society's upkeep.

"There is nothing in the government's proposals to address the chronic lack of enforcement in the context of the wider regulatory problems. As usual, the Tories are playing rhetorically to the gallery.

"Labour are calling for a wide-ranging review of the UK tax gap and will be tabling a range of reform proposals to the Finance Bill, scope allowing. In particular, we will be seeking to strengthen the new penalty for any person

who enables the use of abusive tax avoidance arrangements which has already been watered down since consultation with stakeholders.”

Chinese universities to offer big data majors

China has new 32 universities introducing undergraduate big data programs this year to address talent shortage, according to the Ministry of Education.

In 2016, Peking University, University of International Business and Economics and Central South University became the first three to recruit undergraduates to majors concerning data science and big data technology.

China encouraged universities to set up new degree programs to cater to social and economic development needs.

According to a report by McKinsey Global Institute, by 2018, the United States alone could be short of 140,000 to 190,000 people with deep analytical skills, as well as 1.5 million managers and analysts capable of using the analysis of big data in decision making.

The Palace of Westminster

I was one of the MPs who needed persuading that the Houses of Parliament needs a thorough overhaul and refit such that we need to move out for several years and spend many billions of pounds on the buildings.

I understand that wiring, plumbing and other services need replacing or updating from time to time. These do not all have to be done throughout the Palace at the same time. It is true there is asbestos in the buildings, but most of it is stable and no hazard unless disturbed by builders. Many of the works drawn up for the large project might be nice to have modernisations or improvements, but are not essential to the functioning of the place. Of course there needs to be a regular programme of restoration of stone work and windows to keep the building water tight, and it is crucial to keep roofs in good repair to keep rain out. More of the work can be done in the summer recess, and more can be done by builders taking over smaller sections of the Palace for a time period to do more fundamental work.

I read that following the recent terrorist incident there is some rethinking going on. One of the advantages of the present building is the presence now

of a security strengthened perimeter. On the fateful day it is tragic that a policeman on duty was killed. I trust lessons will be learned about having the right support at entrances to deal with any violent intruder and to protect the police themselves before he does harm. It is also the case that the mass murders and injuries occurred beyond the perimeter. We should be more worried about pedestrian safety outside the Palace as a result of those events. The Bus and cycle lane open to the adjacent pavement allowed the murderer easier and faster access to the victims.