

Statement to Parliament: PM Queen's Speech statement to Parliament: 21 June 2017

Mr Speaker, I am sure the whole house will want to join me in sending our very best wishes to His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh following the news that he has been admitted to hospital.

Our thoughts are with Her Majesty the Queen and all the Royal Family and we wish him a full and speedy recovery.

Mr Speaker, let me also join the Leader of the Opposition in condemning the appalling terrorist attack in his constituency earlier this week. And let me pay tribute to the work he did through the night with his constituents on Sunday.

I know the thoughts and prayers of the whole House are with the family and friends of the victim who died and all those who were injured.

And I am sure the House will want to pay tribute to the police and the emergency services for once again responding with the extraordinary professionalism and courage that makes our whole country so proud of them.

This was the fourth terrorist attack on our country in three months, following the attacks here in Westminster, in Manchester and at London Bridge.

This time it was an attack on British Muslims as they left their place of worship at a sacred time of year.

It was a brutal and sickening reminder that terrorism, extremism and hatred can take many forms – and that our determination to tackle them must be the same whoever is responsible.

This Queen's Speech takes important steps in helping us to do so.

We will review our counter-terrorism strategy to ensure the police and security services have all the powers they need – and that the length of custodial sentences for terrorism-related offences are sufficient to keep people safe.

We will work to reach international agreements that regulate cyberspace to prevent the spread of extremism and terrorist planning – and encourage tech companies to do more to remove harmful content from their networks.

And we will establish a new Commission for Countering Extremism as a statutory body to help fight hatred and extremism in the same way as we have fought racism – because this extremism is every bit as insidious and destructive to our values and we will stop at nothing to defeat it.

Mr Speaker, I hope that whatever our disagreements, we can all at least welcome the focus in this Queen's Speech on stamping out extremist and hateful ideology of any kind, including Islamophobia.

For like all terrorism, in whatever form, Monday's attack sought to drive us apart and to break the precious bonds of solidarity and citizenship that we share in this country.

And our response must be to stand together more strongly than ever. To show that hatred and evil of this kind will never succeed – and that our values and our way of life will always prevail.

Mr Speaker, I would also like to say a few words about the disaster at Grenfell Tower.

The whole country was heartbroken by the horrific loss of life and the utter devastation that we have seen.

I am sure the whole House will join me in sending our deepest condolences to the friends and families of all those who lost loved ones.

And today we also think of those who survived but lost everything. One lady I had met had run from the fire with nothing more than a T-shirt and a pair of knickers. She had lost everything.

Let me be absolutely clear. The support on the ground for families in the initial hours was not good enough. People were left without belongings, without roofs over their heads, without even basic information about what had happened, what they should do and where they could seek help.

That was a failure of the state, local and national, to help people when they needed it most.

As Prime Minister, I apologise for that failure.

And as Prime Minister, I have taken responsibility for doing what we can to put things right.

That is why each family whose home was destroyed is receiving a down-payment from the emergency fund so they can buy food, clothes and other essentials.

And all those who have lost their homes will be rehoused within three weeks.

There will also be an independent public inquiry chaired by a judge to get to the truth about what happened and who was responsible – and provide justice for the victims and their families who suffered so terribly.

All those with an interest – including survivors and victims' families, will be consulted about the terms of reference. And those affected will have their legal costs paid.

And because it is clear that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea haven't been able to cope with the scale of the tragedy, we will also develop

a new strategy for resilience in major disasters – which could include a new Civil Disaster Response Taskforce that can help at times of emergency.

Finally, Mr Speaker, we must learn some of the lessons of this and previous disasters where bereaved families have not had the support they need.

So we will also introduce an independent public advocate for public disasters:

A strong independent voice for victims, acting on behalf of bereaved families and supporting them at public inquests and inquiries.

Mr Speaker, let me join the Leader of the Opposition in paying tribute to the two Members of Parliament that we lost in the course of last year.

Gerald Kaufman was an outstanding Parliamentarian who served this House and his constituents in Manchester for an incredible 46 years.

We did not agree on everything. But as Father of the House he was an invaluable source of wisdom and experience for Members on all sides. And he will be greatly missed.

The despicable murder of Jo Cox shocked and devastated this House and this country.

Jo was an inspirational MP, a campaigner and a humanitarian whose mission in life was defined by hope and love.

Her killer sought instead to spread hate and division. But last weekend as part of the Great Get Together, I and many hundreds of thousands of others came together in her honour, we stood together, pulled together all across the country to unite against that hatred and to prove in Jo's own words – that "we have far more in common than that which divides us"

I am sure the whole House will join me in paying tribute also to Jo's husband Brendan, for the extraordinary courage and strength that he has shown in dealing with such personal tragedy and for honouring Jo's memory in such an inspiring way.

Whatever our disagreements in this House, may we all honour Jo's memory and show that in our United Kingdom, hope will always triumph over hate.

Mr Speaker, the House will know that the first part of a successful Queen's Speech is finding someone to propose it.

It is of course intended to be a witty speech, as indeed the speech from my Rt Hon Friend the Member for Newbury was today.

From my point of view a little too witty, because he took all the jokes I had written in my speech. But I have to say my Rt Hon Friend over the years he has been the member for Newbury and in the years he was fighting to win the seat, he has shown great commitment to his constituents but also to his constituents in the important task of government of building a stronger

economy and fairer society and I know for example that as a fellow Berkshire MP that the work he has done to raise awareness of an issue that I am particularly concerned about, namely the issue of mental health.

He's also made a significant contribution during his time as a minister. I understand that once during his time as Fisheries Minister, he mixed up his cod with his skate, but I am sure, like the rest of us, he will not fail to welcome the absence in this House today of Salmond.

My rt hon friend

My Rt Hon Friend the Member for Newbury showed great skill and tenacity over three years of negotiations on the Common Fisheries Policy.

It started with the UK as a minority of one and ended with the EU unanimously supporting a reform agenda, the principles of which will be at the heart of the Fisheries Bill in this Queen's Speech.

He was also the Minister who secured cross-party support for moving our canals and waterways from the public to the charitable sector, creating the Canal and River Trust, one of the biggest and best endowed charities in the country.

He made an excellent speech today, in the finest traditions of this House.

Mr Speaker, the Queen's Speech was brilliantly seconded by my Hon Friend, the Member for Spelthorne.

My Hon Friend the member for Spelthorne is a distinguished political historian and a prolific writer as the opposition pointed out. And he has a particular interest in female Prime Ministers.

Indeed, Members may know that his most recent book profiled the most testing six months for our country's first female Prime Minister.

It ran to 272 pages. I fear his next book could be somewhat longer.

My Hon Friend is also widely regarded for his good looks.

In fact, the Sunday Telegraph once described him as a Tory "heart-throb"

During his time on University Challenge, I gather he even made it to page 3 of The Sun.

Perhaps most significantly, My Hon Friend is confounding the Daily Mail, who cited the 1995 University Challenge winning team of which my Hon Friend was a Member when arguing that "all too often the brainy winners of the BBC's flagship programme sink without trace after their moment in the spotlight."

I could not disagree more.

The House has today seen his talents on full display. He gave a tremendous speech, with flair, substance and wit.

He brings an historian's wisdom to the challenges and opportunities which our country faces and I have no doubt that he will make a major contribution in the years ahead.

Mr Speaker, let me welcome the Hon Member for Ross, Skye & Lochaber as the new leader of the SNP here in Westminster.

I am also, of course, particularly pleased to welcome to the Conservative benches my thirteen Scottish Conservative colleagues – it is good that my Right Hon Friend the Scottish Secretary will not have to put up with any more jokes about pandas.

Mr Speaker, turnout at the election was higher than in 2015 – including many more younger people – and while on this side of the House we would have preferred more of them to vote for us – more young people going to the ballot box is something we should all welcome.

Mr Speaker, let me also welcome the Rt Hon Member for Islington North back to his place as the Leader of the Opposition.

He fought a spirited campaign and he came a good second – which was better than the pundits predicted and than many of his own MPs hoped.

The election also showed that – as it faces the big challenges of our future – our country is divided: red vs blue, young vs old, leave vs remain.

As I said here last week, the test for all of us is whether we choose to reflect divisions or help the country overcome them.

With humility and resolve, this government will seek to do the latter.

We will do what is in the national interest – and we will work with anyone in any party that is prepared to do the same.

We will work every day to earn the trust and confidence of the British people.

And we will make their priorities our priorities, dealing head-on with the major challenges that our country faces.

And that is what this Queen's Speech is all about.

Mr Speaker, this Queen's Speech is about recognising and grasping the opportunities for every community in our country to benefit as we leave the European Union.

It is about delivering the will of the British people with a Brexit deal that works for all parts of our United Kingdom and that commands the greatest possible public support.

It is about building a new, deep and special partnership with our European friends and neighbours – because we are leaving the European Union but we are not leaving Europe.

And it is about seizing this moment of national change to deliver a Plan for a Stronger, Fairer Britain by strengthening our economy, tackling injustice and promoting opportunity and aspiration for all.

Because as I have said many times before, the referendum vote was not just a vote to leave the European Union, it was a profound and justified expression that our country often does not work the way it should for millions of ordinary families.

This Queen's Speech begins to change that, by putting fairness at the heart of our agenda.

It's about building a stronger economy – delivering a modern industrial strategy so that all parts of our country and all parts of our society share in the benefits of economic growth.

Investing in the world-leading infrastructure that can unlock growth in our economy and improve the quality of people's lives across the whole country.

Building a fairer society, increasing the National Living Wage so that people who are on the lowest pay see their wages go up as the economy strengthens.

And also ensuring that every child has access to a good school place, creating a world-class system of technical education, so that all young people have the vital skills they need to do the jobs of the future.

Acting to make markets fairer, by tackling unfair practices wherever they are found.

Tackling the housing crisis that locks so many young people out of the housing market.

We also want to build a more secure United Kingdom, investing in our defence and national security and enhancing our leading role on the world stage.

Strengthening the social, economic and cultural bonds between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Delivering on our commitment to devolution, by working in co-operation with all the devolved administrations. And working with all the parties of Northern Ireland to support the return of devolved government.

Building a country that is stronger, fairer, safer and more secure for all our children and grandchildren: a country that works for everyone.

That is our ambition. And that is what this Queen's Speech will help to deliver.

The first part of this Queen's Speech is of course about Brexit. A Brexit deal that works for every part of the country and that commands the greatest possible public support.

Over 80 per cent of the electorate backed the two major parties – both of

whom campaigned on manifestos that said we should honour the democratic decision of the British people.

So this government will respect the will of the British people and see Brexit through.

We will seek to build a wide consensus as we do this and we take bills through this house, which will include a trade bill, a repeal bill, an immigration bill, as have been referred to. And also bills to deal with control of access of control to our waters for fisherman and greater stability to farmers with a new build on agriculture.

If we're going to grasp the opportunities as we leave the European Union, we are going to need a stronger economy. That's right, as Conservatives we have always understood this side of the house that sound money and fiscal credibility is the foundation for everything else.

That is why it was right to take the tough decisions we did after the financial crash.

And it paid off. The deficit is down by three quarters; employment up by 2.9 million – and at the same time because of policies like our National Living Wage and taking 4 million of the lowest paid out of income tax altogether – inequality has been reduced to its lowest level in 30 years.

In this Queen's Speech we will work towards getting the country back living within its means. We will also invest in the digital infrastructure it needs to benefit from the opportunities of new technology.

I've said that we will protect rights and protect people at work as we leave the European Union but what we won't do is we won't follow the economic prescriptions of the party opposite.

Because there is nothing fair about punitive tax rises that lead to fewer jobs, lower wages and higher prices for ordinary working families. There is nothing fair about racking up debts for our children and grandchildren to pay.

The only government that you can trust to build a stronger and fairer economy is a Conservative government.

Mr Speaker, I want Britain to be a genuine Great Meritocracy – a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will take them.

That is about ensuring everyone plays by the same rules. It's about ensuring every child has access to a good school place, it's about ensuring that that right to technical education is there, and the measures in the Queen's Speech will help with that.

But it will also help deal with some of the injustices in our society – the draft domestic violence and abuse legislation provides a statutory definition of this hideous crime and will ensure protective orders are available and

victims get the justice they deserve.

This is a measure that I hope will be able to command support across the whole of this house. There are many in this house who have championed the cause of dealing with domestic abuse for many years and I hope they will be able to join us in supporting this legislation.

Mr Speaker, we will also deliver a more secure United Kingdom, because of the choices we are making to prioritise our defence and national security.

Our Armed Forces Bill will give those who put their lives on the line in the service of our country the proper respect they deserve – with more security in the way they live and work.

Our commitment to renew Trident, means this country maintains its continuous at sea nuclear deterrent as the ultimate guarantee of our safety – and a Prime Minister who is prepared to use it.

And we will continue to play a leading role in international efforts to tackle mass migration and climate change, to alleviate poverty and end modern slavery.

Because, Mr Speaker, we have always looked beyond Europe to the wider world and we will continue to do so.

Mr Speaker. Let me end by saying this.

This has been a difficult time for our country. I know there are many parents worried about the kind of world their children are growing up in.

I recognise that and understand it. It has been an unsettling time, which has tested the spirit of our country. But we are a resilient country. Our response to disaster and to acts of terror which take the lives of innocent people must be this: Compassion. Unity. Resolve.

For we are a great nation, and a great people. We have been through, and survived, the toughest of times before. And we thrived. Once again we can, and will, grow stronger from the challenges we face today.

The Queen's speech on its own will not solve every challenge our country faces. Not every problem can be solved by an Act of Parliament. But it is a step forward to building a more compassionate, more united, and more confident nation.

That is what this government will aim to achieve – and it's what this Queen's speech will help deliver.

And I commend this Queen's Speech to the House.