

DR PHILIPPA WHITFORD MP



As we enter 2018, I wanted to update you on some of my work during 2017. Politically, it was a year dominated by two main issues - Brexit and Austerity - both of which will remain at the forefront of the Parliamentary agenda for many months to come. There was also the small matter of a snap General Election and I am extremely grateful to all those who voted to re-elect me as the MP for Central Ayrshire and gave me the opportunity to continue with the various projects I had undertaken over the preceding two years. It is a privilege to represent the area which has been my home for the past 20 years and I hope the work I do helps enrich the area and the lives of those who live and work here.

REFLECTING ON MY YEAR...

TASTE OF AYRSHIRE

In February, the four Ayrshire SNP MPs teamed up to host an event in Westminster to promote the region ahead of the UK Government's decision on funding the Ayrshire Growth Deal. The morning session showcased Ayrshire's Larder, focusing on the county's exceptional and award-winning food and drink, and the afternoon gave a platform to local businesses to show the varied and vibrant industries Ayrshire has to offer. The event was a great success; however, despite a commitment from the Scottish Government, the UK Government has thus far refused to invest in the AGD.



UNIVERSAL CREDIT BILL



In November, I brought a Bill to reform the UK Government's new flagship welfare policy Universal Credit before Parliament. The roll-out of UC has been absolutely shambolic, with 1 in 4 applicants going more than 6 weeks without receiving payment, resulting in them falling into rent arrears, debt and going hungry. My Bill received cross-party support at the first stage and I was given leave to bring a Bill forward this spring. Here's hoping we can bring pressure to bear on the UK Government to fully reform it.



DEMENTIA FRIENDLY TROON



In September, I was delighted to have the honour of formally launching Dementia Friendly Troon, a project I initiated, to help make the town and surrounding villages more Dementia friendly and enable those with the condition, as well as their carers, to feel more comfortable and more welcome when they are out and about in our community.

SUPPORTING WASPI



The SNP Group in Westminster has taken the fight for justice for the WASPI women to Parliament calling on the UK Government to mitigate the impact of the accelerated pension equalization on women born in the 1950s. I have spoken up for the WASPI women on many occasions and in December we forced a vote on the issue. Although defeated, the vote will allow WASPI women to see if their MP honoured the pledge they made during the election

AYRSHIRE FOOD SECURITY NETWORK

With increased austerity leading to a huge rise in poverty and child poverty, the growth in foodbank referrals and initiatives such as school holiday food clubs is unprecedented. As Vice Chair of the APPG on Hunger, I have been absolutely shocked at the evidence we have taken in our inquiries on childhood hunger - quite unbelievable in the 21st century. Although we have services for those who require them, they are mostly run by voluntary organisations, and so I brought together local groups involved



in combating food poverty to initiate a pilot project which would develop a network of food support projects to ensure we share resources and infrastructure, to be ambitious, and to explore ways of providing more fresh, nutritious foods to combat rising malnutrition.

'WEAR IT PINK' DAY

In October, I hosted the Wear it Pink photo-call at Westminster, where 270 MPs dressed up in silly costumes and took photographs to help promote Breast Cancer Awareness Month.



EASTER DIP

On Easter Saturday, NAC Provost Clarkson and I got 'wet to the neck' in the sea at Irvine beach, to raise funds for the Ayrshire Hospice and Cash for Kids. Thanks to everyone who sponsored me so generously.



MP OF THE YEAR

I was delighted to be nominated as 'MP of the Year' in the Patchwork UK awards, which give people from grassroots community organisations the opportunity to commend MPs for the hard work they do throughout the year. Although I didn't win, I was extremely proud to have my work recognised and I thank all those who nominated me.



RETURN TO PALESTINE

During the September Parliamentary recess, I spent 10 days working in The West Bank, Gaza City and East Jerusalem, travelling with and working for the organisation Medical Aid for Palestinians to help develop breast cancer services in Palestine. Having previously worked for them as a volunteer in a UN hospital, I returned to Gaza in 2016 and was shocked at the number of women who were unable to access appropriate radiotherapy treatment due to the Israeli blockade of Gaza. As a result, many women end up undergoing a full mastectomy when other, less invasive, treatment would be preferable. In September, I travelled with a full team of breast cancer specialists from Scotland to initiate a project which will help



provide training and develop better services at every stage - diagnosis, treatment, and aftercare - for the women of the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

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BREXIT RIGHTS



I signed up to support the call for the UK Government to guarantee post-Brexit EU Citizens' Rights in the UK which would in turn help protect British Citizens' Rights in the EU. After 18 months, EU citizens and their families are still not much further forward in knowing what their status and rights will be once the UK has left the EU. They are our friends and neighbours, our doctors and nurses, our work colleagues, and they enrich our culture with their diversity as well as our economy. It is a disgrace that this has still not been resolved and my SNP colleagues and I will continue to fight for them to have certainty over their future.

SCRAP THE CAP

In September, I joined nurses from the Royal College of Nursing as they rallied on Parliament Square to call on the UK Government to scrap the 1% pay cap for NHS and other public sector workers, as the Scottish Government has committed to doing. NHS staff in Scotland are already paid the highest rate of all four UK nations and by paying those at the lowest end of the pay scale the Real Living Wage, as opposed to the minimum wage, which is much lower, nurses based in Scotland earn £300 more than nurses in England, while for Health Care Assistants the difference is over £1,100.



LOOKING FORWARD...

On a more positive note, January has brought the second reading of the Space Industry Bill to Parliament. I have been actively promoting Prestwick's potential as a Spaceport since first being elected in 2015, during which time we have gone from being a complete outsider to one of the two main contenders, and I therefore led the debate for the SNP. If Prestwick was to be granted a licence, it would see the aerospace industry in Ayrshire expand with new and exciting job opportunities as well as expanding the existing supply chain, significantly benefiting local companies and the local economy. In March, I will bring forward my Bill to amend Universal Credit to try and fix the administrative problems. Although Private Member's Bills such as these do not often result in legislation, the Bill received cross-party support at the first stage and should, at least, help keep up the pressure on the UK Government to make further changes to the policy which has brought so much misery to so many people since the roll-out began.

