I DO LIKE MONDAYS

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IN THE middle of the chaos and bizarre behaviour of many MPs in the House of Commons that has been going on for at least three years, occasionally a few credible words and recommendations are heard. If these could be pooled together it might make Parliament more credible than it is at present.

However, sadly, no sooner have some good debates and comments occurred than the poor behaviour and lack of understanding reappears like a mist that blocks out the brightness of such contributions. Last Wednesday a number of positive contributions were made by Sussex MPs that deserve to be promoted, even though they took place while some of the same people voted on Brexit matters in a way that will deeply damage to our communities.

During that day there was a debate in Westminster Hall, convened by Gillian Keegan, the MP for Chichester on the theme of Disability Assessments. It was an excellent debate even though it was chaired by Christopher Chope who thankfully only made one brief contribution to remind people of the time left.

As Sarah Newton the Minister pointed out at the end of the debate, there was a “compelling debate going on in the main Chamber, yet many Members chose to prioritise this debate, which is to the great credit of everybody who has participated” Apart from Gillian, no other Sussex MP took part but the contributions from members of all political parties made it very clear that Sarah and her colleagues need to resolve a great many failings of the system.

Indeed she seemed to accept this and stated “I want to make sure that disabled people co-design the service with us. We are starting soon on stakeholder engagement to enable that. We will work with the medical professionals—as I said, we will do a lot of work over the summer on this—stakeholders and disabled people. We want to improve people’s confidence and trust in the system, and make it properly accessible”.

Along with the very positive contributions which Gillian acted as a catalyst for, Huw Merriman from Bexhill and Battle asked a question during Prime Ministers Questions which got nevertheless a very positive question “We want three things... first, more funding for our schools; secondly, on special educational needs, we need more focus and priority on stopping panels excluding pupils unnecessarily because of their targets; and thirdly, the lowest-funded areas should be funded
first when we get this right.”

The same theme was carried on by Tim Loughton when the Spring Statement by the Chancellor was being discussed. Tim stated “I am pleased to hear that the Chancellor recognises the urgency of schools funding in the spending review, but will he not ignore children’s social care?”

Another positive contribution was made by Nicholas Soames who spoke during a short discussion on the way “dark money” is being used by deeply anti-democratic organisations to try to control how Parliament and other political organisations operate.

The comment from Soames included “This matter really is first-order business for the Government. Our electoral system has always been something of which this country has been proud. I urge my Hon Friend to push ahead with the steps needed to control this activity because it is clear that on these big issues it is very bad news if people believe that the electoral system has been corrupted.”

Having focused on comments made by Conservative Party MPs the final example relates to a call for a private members bill by Lloyd Russell-Moyle on a matter that will have a great deal of resonance for many of us who live in Sussex. The Bill is referred to as “Tenancy (Deposits and Arbitration)” and it was given its first reading last Wednesday and will be given its second reading this Friday. Just as Christopher Chope was referred to above, one can only hope that he and his colleagues in the tribe of Objectors and Filibusters are held back from impacting this important Bill. As Lloyd explained: “I am introducing my Bill partly because of the treatment of my constituent Andy Smith.

“He was living in an apartment owned by Baron Homes... [they] alleged that there was damage to the property and said it would keep the entire £650 deposit. In any event, withholding the deposit was an act of bad faith because the property was to be gutted and turned into two luxury studio flats... Michael Ball, professor of urban and property economics at the University of Reading, concludes: “Tenancy deposit schemes are poor value for money in the UK costing the sector more than £275 million a year in fees and administration”.

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