



Lord Lexden

Conservative peer and historian

Many kind people have asked me: “Is it a record?” – referring to my long stint chairing committee proceedings on the Illegal Migration Bill. I took my seat at 9.30pm on Wednesday 7 June and left it at 4.16am on Thursday 8 June when I adjourned the House at “long, long last” (words which do not appear in *Hansard*).

I don’t think there can be any doubt that it is a record. Like many strange events, it was totally unforeseen. I happened to be the last person on the rota of deputy speakers for the day. No one, I think, foresaw that proceedings would go on for so long after midnight, when the House had originally been expected to rise.

I have been much commended in delicate fashion for needing no short break. My doctor, who has been a little concerned about some aspects of my ageing system, telephoned with warm congratulations.

Viscount Mersey, a deputy speaker long ago, noted an interesting point about the House of Commons in his diary in May 1939. He wrote: “In former days the Speaker could never leave the chair during a sitting: so a small convenience was placed under his table, and when he made use of it the House looked away.” I don’t think this practice was ever adopted in the Lords.

Later in the morning of the 8 June when I was away (not sleeping, but having my teeth inspected in the village of Lexden on the outskirts of Colchester), Susan Williams, the government Chief Whip, conferred a great accolade by referring to me as “a national treasure”.

It seems that this flattering term was first used by Ronald Reagan in praise of Andy Williams, the renowned singer (perhaps I should have hummed *Can’t Take My Eyes Off You* to help while away the small hours).



I find it very hard to say a good word about the Home Office. For months I have been asking oral questions to find out why a gross misconduct hearing in Cleveland involving a former chief constable Mike Veale, which was announced nearly two years ago, has not even started.

Steve Turner, the Cleveland police and crime commissioner, refuses to give any sensible explanation for the delay. “Watch our website,” his hopelessly inefficient office says.

The Home Office accepts that it could act, but won’t. A written answer I received last week asserts that the commissioner must be left entirely to his own devices.

This is absurd, as all sides of the House agree. Not a single voice has been raised in support of the Home Office’s extraordinary position.

The Home Office only deserves a single, faint cheer on another issue. For over six years it has been under pressure to expand the scheme through which gay people convicted under homophobic laws, now repealed, can have their convictions wiped from the record.

Michael Cashman and I have repeatedly demanded action, working in close association with our good friend professor Paul Johnson of Leeds University, a leading expert on LGBT legal issues.

On Tuesday last week the Home Office finally announced changes. But we had to point out that it failed to update its website or provide the right application form.



In the evening following my Lords marathon, I went to a reception at the Imperial War Museum to mark the completion of Terry Etherton’s review of the shameful way LGBT members of the armed forces were treated in the past. Thousands were dismissed; some imprisoned. Over 1,100 of them have given evidence to Terry’s review, reliving past suffering and distress. The report is now with the government. It must respond swiftly and positively.

After the reception, Paul Johnson took a rather flattering picture of me [insert above]. It rounded off a memorable day. 📷

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