

Judith Boyce Talk

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J: Judith Boyce

J: Thank you very much, Anne-Marie, Marina, Carrie and team for having me over again this morning. I've been at this event a few times now. I hope if you've heard me speak before, I will not repeat myself too much this morning, trying to keep it topical. Thank you also to Gareth. I found those remarks and reflections really interesting and it's almost as if I'd slipped him a fiver before he stood up to tee up some of the things that I'm going to say.

So I have in my mind his thoughts about the sausage machine of legislation, about non-executive bills and about the fact that legislative hyperactivity does not necessarily mean productivity. So that's all going to be very relevant to what I'm going to say this morning.

This time last year, I was, well, I've been clerk of the Transport Committee for a few years now. I've been working in the House of Commons in various capacities since 2008. This time last year, I think I was full of the joys of a new parliament, huge numbers of new MPs, a very different energy about the place. And I have to say a year on, it still feels pretty shiny and new. New MPs are still getting used to parliament and we're still getting used to them.

In a lot of ways, it's been quite a sort of standard year in parliament. There's not an awful lot that's very unusual to talk about. We're back to the days of having a government with, in theory at least, a very large and stable majority.

So when I was thinking about what to talk about this morning, I thought I would focus, well, I can say a bit about what we're doing on the Transport Committee, but I'm actually going to flip around the order of what I was going to talk about this morning and instead take you through to start talking about bills because I don't want to squeeze this bit too much.

So sorry for the flashing images. Hopefully I'll get a chance to come back to some of that at the end. That was a spoiler for you there with the ticks coming up.

Here we are.

Bills and legislation in this parliament. Particularly, I'm going to talk about what at Westminster we call private members' bills and what here would be, some of which at least would be non-executive bills. I was interested to think about the commission and the committees introducing bills. We don't have any of those same provisions at Westminster.

But I really want to talk about one bill in particular and it's one which has kind of dominated a lot of the year in politics. It's dominated a lot of members' time. And I think because it's so unusual, it will help me to shed a little bit of light on how we normally do bills at Westminster as well. So hopefully this will be of interest to you.

Now, again, this time last year, I think I used this very same slide last year because this was quite recent at the time. This is the ballot for private members' bills, which took place on the

5th of September, 2024. And this is essentially a big raffle in which members choose a number. Often they'll choose their lucky number or something to do with their birthday or something like that. And all of the numbered balls go into literally a big goldfish bowl. And the chairman of Ways and Means, who's the first deputy speaker, Nisrat Ghani, here was presiding over her first private members' bill ballot, wears the white gloves of the snooker referee and picks the little wooden balls out of the bowl. And this is to decide which members get the best opportunities to introduce their own legislation, their own proposals for law, and to have a chance at making it through this sausage machine to become acts.

I'll say this, I've mentioned this before, this is not the only way that members can put forward their own legislation, backbench members, but there are very low prospects for success on the other routes. So your best chances are through the ballot. And these are the 20 winners of the ballot, I suppose, the lucky few. One odd quirk of a random process is not a single Conservative made it onto the list of 20 this year, there's no conspiracy there, it literally just balls out of the bowl.

And these 20 members are the winners of the ballot. Really, it's all about the top seven, for a reason that I'll explain shortly. And this year, most of our attention has been focused on number one in the ballot, Kim Leadbeater, the Labour MP for Spen Valley.

Becoming number one in the ballot gives you first bite of the cherry, it gives you the first and best opportunities of as long as you choose something that the House is going to support, making it through this sausage machine. And it became known quite early on that Kim Leadbeater was going to use this golden opportunity to introduce a bill seeking to make provision for what is usually known as assisted dying for terminally ill adults. The formal name of the bill is the Terminally Ill Adults End of Life Bill. This is what we call the short title and the long title of the bill. These have to be decided quite early on. They're not the only thing that determine the scope of the bill, but they give you a very good idea, they're supposed to give you a very good idea of what the contents of the bill are going to be. And this is as it's presented for its first stage, it's presentation or first reading in the House.

Now, already we can tell that compared to other private members bills, this one is a bit different. It is ambitious, it is weighty, it is extremely controversial. It is literally about matters of life and death. And it's a matter of conscience as well, which is going to become important because the government officially doesn't have a policy on this. And therefore, it's not going to whip its members in support of it or against it. And that has quite a big effect on how the process plays out as well.

Now, much like Gareth, I'm not going to talk about the policy, I'm not qualified to, I wouldn't talk about it anyway, but the way that procedurally we have dealt with this bill, I think is hopefully of interest.

Now, I've said it's different to other private members bills, I might mention a few examples later on, but one, a typical private members bill, if you like, there is a bill that's made quite a lot of progress this year, which is changing the procedure by which pub licensing hours are extended. So if there's a big football tournament on or the Queen's Jubilee or something, and we want the pubs to stay open a little bit later, this is literally just saying, we're going to do this by this procedure instead of that procedure. Like that's the kind of scale often of a successful private members bill. This is a whole other ballgame, as you can tell.

Now, it's very helpful to get that first go to come top of the ballot because you have an awful lot of hurdles that you have to overcome to become law. I'm sure you will be familiar with many of these. You've got hurdles to clear and time is of the essence.

So this is the same process. Private members bills go through exactly the same process as for government bills. First reading is just a formal presentation. Second reading is a debate on the principles of the bill. If you pass that, you go into committee stage. That's when detailed changes start being made to the text of the bill. When the committee is finished, it reports back to the house. You have report stage. Further amendments can be made at that point. Third reading then is a chance to say, right now that we've made all the changes to the bill, what do we think of it in totality? And if you get through all of that, of course, then it's off to the House of Lords for exactly the same process down the corridor.

Obviously, the principle is Commons and Lords have to agree on the same text of a bill. If at the end of this process, they have different texts, then you go through the whole ping pong process and you have even more hurdles to clear of Lords and Commons amendments. There's a lot to do.

I want to highlight two particular ways in which private members' bills and government bills differ. There's probably more ways than this, but I think these are some of the more important ones. One is the timetable and one is the role of the member in charge.

This is Kim Leadbeater, the member in charge of this bill. You might also hear people talk about sponsor or promoter of a bill, but we use the term member in charge generally.

Now, if you think about a government bill and all the advantages it's got, it is shepherded through the House by ministers who are there to promote and speak for the policy, who will be defending the bill against opposition amendments, who will be trying to persuade their colleagues to support it.

Those ministers are supported by the institutional might of the civil service, who are there to give advice on the policy and the technical aspects of the bill.

The process is going to be managed by what we call the business managers. That's a kind of loose term, but it covers the leader of the House of Commons, who's in overall charge of what business the government brings forward, and the whips who are doing a huge amount of the work, largely behind the scenes, to talk about timing, to negotiate with the opposition parties, and obviously to get their own members in line.

And then there's other roles. There's the PPSs, the sort of often called parliamentary bag carriers. There's the special advisers in departments, all of whom are helping with the politics behind the bills and doing a lot of negotiation and behind the scenes work. And then, of course, when it comes to vote, you have presumably, if your whips are doing their job, you have your own MPs who will troop through the lobbies behind you as a government minister.

For this bill, there is only Kim Leadbeater doing most of those jobs. She is the MP for Spen Valley. She was elected in 2021 at a by-election for the seat of Batley and Spen, a seat which had previously been held by her sister, Jo Cox, who was tragically murdered in 2016. So she's been in the House since 2021. So she's not a newbie. She's not one of these wet behind the ears, new 2024 intake. But neither is she somebody who's been around for decades and knows the place inside out. She's never had the chance to be a government minister, for example. I

think she was an assistant whip for a while in opposition. She sat on various public bill committees. So she's not completely new to these processes, but she doesn't have that kind of institutional machinery behind her. So she is, to a large extent, doing her own stunts on this bill. And these are some of the roles that she is having to take on.

Now, she's not literally the minister or the whip, but she's doing quite a lot of the jobs that those people end up doing when government legislation goes through. You know, thinking about who's going to be there, thinking about who's going to be on the committee, talking to the bill, defending it against amendments that she doesn't want to accept. She's the public face of this bill. And I think that has probably put her very much in the firing line of people who are opposed to this.

And she's, you know, she's a campaigner in many ways. This is a policy that she believes in and she wants to see go through. And so she'll be trying to persuade people of its merits. And she'll also be doing, you know, negotiation behind the scenes with people about things like what witnesses to hear from, which amendments are going to go down, et cetera, et cetera. So it's an awful lot to do. And to do it for a bill of this magnitude is a massive job for one backbench member of parliament. It is not easy at all.

And while she is doing this, of course, she's also doing her day job as a constituency MP, as, you know, other members who are involved. I think she is a member of a select committee as well at the same time and other parliamentary duties. You know, maybe she'll be expecting, she's expected to turn up and vote on other things and participate in other proceedings and so on. So it's a massive workload.

Now she has had a bit of help, notably when it came to drafting the bill. She made what was probably a very wise choice to get an absolute expert in bill drafting to help her. Most private members' bills are drafted by my colleagues in the public bill office. And most of them are drafted by one person, in fact. That person is not a lawyer and does not have formal training in parliamentary drafting. And people often find that a little bit shocking. But the truth is that most private members' bills are not destined to become law. And it would be a bit of a misallocation of resources if we got loads and loads of lawyers to produce perfect bills every time.

What the public bill office is usually doing is producing a bill that is good enough for us to have a sensible debate about it. And if it gets close to becoming law, the government will swoop in with lots of amendments to make sure that it's workable.

But Kim Leadbeater instead secured the services of Elizabeth Gardner, who was former parliamentary counsel. Parliamentary counsel is the, it's not actually a parliamentary office, it's a government office. They're the ones who draft government bills. And she was head of that office up until her retirement a couple of years ago. And I believe pro bono, she took on the work of drafting this bill. So it was done by an expert.

And she's also had some civil service support to call on. Again, the government is neutral officially on the policy of this bill, but it has an interest in if a bill is passed, it has to be workable as legislation. It has to be a workable part of the statute book. And so civil servants have been involved in advising on that. But it's still a fearsome workload.

So the other big difference, as well as the fact that it's one member leading this, is about time and how time operates for the two different types of bills.

So you think about all of the advantages that a government bill has. And for good reason. A government is elected by the people, usually with a majority. It has a mandate to put into practice its legislative programme. And therefore it's appropriate that in all of our procedures and conventions, there is recognition of the fact that the government has a right to pursue its legislative programme. So there's nothing wrong with this control. It's just how the system works. But the government controls for itself when it presents its bills, when second reading and the additional stages will be. It also controls business in the house. So the business managers can look and say, we're going to debate this bill on that Tuesday and that other bill the following Wednesday. They have control over all of those levers.

Private members bills, however, are subject to a bit of a conveyor belt under our standing orders. They are bound by the timing of the ballot. There is a strict rule about when those bills have to be presented. They are restricted to Fridays in the House of Commons. So if they need debate in the chamber, or any proceedings on them really, that can only take place usually on a Friday. And there are only 13 of those Fridays provided for by the standing orders in each parliamentary session. And the government gets to decide when those Fridays are.

And I've used the phrase cab rank principles here. It's the best way I could think of to describe it. It's a very heavily modified cab rank principle. There's lots of little caveats to it and so on. But they're not in control of their own timetable. There are various rules that will dictate the order of precedence of the different bills that are coming forward. And there's a lot of interesting sort of game theory, I think, about when members, the decisions that they then make in order to either take advantage of or try to circumvent those rules.

Government bills, the other big advantage they have, of course, is they can be carried over to a new session of Parliament. Now, sessions are there to be a formal check on the government. The idea is that you ought to be able to get your legislation through in a timely way. And if it's taking too long, then maybe that is a sign that your legislation either is ill thought through or it doesn't quite have the support that it ought to be able to command in Parliament. And if you can't get your bill through by the end of the session, then you have to start again in the new session.

But the government has a great sort of opt out to this. It has a great get out, which is that it can avail of carry over. So towards the end of a parliamentary session, you'll see lots of motions going down to carry over such and such a bill to the next session. So they say, we know the end of the session is coming, but we're going to carry this bill over and we're not going to have to start from scratch again in the new session. Private members' bills do not have that advantage. They must be done within the session of Parliament.

Now, the other great get out that the government has, of course, is effective control over how long that session is. And so that is a huge advantage to them in managing their legislative programme. And with a new session, the legislative slate is restarted with the King's speech. Here comes the King to give the speech at the opening of this Parliament.

The default for a session is roughly a calendar year, but that does not happen automatically. You will know that proroguing Parliament and starting a new session is formally a prerogative power of the Crown. But in practice, it is something that is exercised by the executive, by the government.

Now, sessions at the start of a Parliament are habitually a little bit longer than your calendar year. But recently, we've got into the habit of having very long sessions at the beginning of

Parliaments. We had the 2010 to 2012 session at the beginning of the coalition government. We had the 2017 to 2019 session. That was the justification for that was the need to get lots of Brexit-related legislation through. Then we had 2019 to 2021. I mean, we only just started sitting in 2019, so that one's a little bit different.

But it became obvious earlier this year that the government was counting on extending the current session into 2026. It was a big administrative pain because we had to rename all of our digital files from 2024 to 2025 to, say, 2026 instead, and that broke a lot of links. It was a bit annoying. But it was confirmed in the summer that the session would go on to 2026, but we still don't know when in 2026. The assumption is it's going to be spring. Spring in government terms could mean March, could mean June, and they could yet extend it further. But this is all very handy, this flexibility for a government with a big legislative programme. And indeed, there were 35 bills set out in the King's Speech in 2024. Of those, 17 have received royal assent.

I've said here two have still to be introduced. I think I saw one being presented on Wednesday this week, so this is now out of date. There's only one King's Speech bill still to be introduced. But, you know, I think about 20 of them were introduced in 2024, but they've kept trickling through, and some really big pieces of legislation, notably for us on the Transport Committee, the Railways Bill, was only introduced last week. So they are making full use of this ability to extend the session.

And the other flexibility they have is whether to introduce these bills in the Commons or the Lords. You can see the balance there. This means you can be effectively doing almost twice as much legislation at once, because you start in either house and then you will swap over. And a big government bill can easily take more than a calendar year to get through its processes to Royal Assent, so that's very helpful. And that's what Private Members' Bills don't have, is that flexibility.

These are the 13 Fridays that were named by the government at the start of this Parliament as the only days on which Private Members' Bills will be considered in the Chamber. And so time starts ticking as soon as you start getting through these Fridays.

Now, I talked about the cab rank principle. Let me try and explain a little bit more about the way in which it's a very eccentric cab rank.

The reason why the first seven bills in the ballot have an advantage is because special rules apply to the first seven of those Fridays. The ballot bills have precedence over those days, so the top seven members get to choose a day on which they will have precedence over any other business, and they are therefore guaranteed a debate on second reading of their bill.

They're not guaranteed they will get their second reading, but they're at least guaranteed to get a debate, and for some bills, that is the height of their ambition because they know they're not going to be supported, so what they want is a good showing in the Chamber, a good discussion about the bill.

Succeed at second reading and your bill goes into committee, and then when you come out of committee again, the last six of those Fridays, precedence swaps over. Precedence is now given to those bills which have made progress, so if they've been through committee and they're coming back for their report stage, they get first dibs on the remaining six of those Fridays.

There's a further wrinkle. You get one go at having your report stage, and if you don't get through on the first day, then another bill that's due for its report stage can hop over you, so you can see there's a lot of potential for strategy here as well, and remember 11th of July 2025 seemed like a long way away from summer 2024, you've got to get through the House of Lords after this as well. This is only the Commons stages.

So let's rewind to Kim Leadbeater's bill. This is the start of the process. The ballot was on the 5th of September. She had to have her bill by standing orders ready for presentation on the 16th of October 2024, just about six weeks later. The full text was then needed for second reading. Her second reading, she was obviously going to take the first of those Fridays on the 29th of November. In practice, this is such an important bill of interest to so many people that she knew she needed to have the text ready and published a bit more in advance of that. I think it was ready about two weeks before the second reading.

Now, this is reasonable for most private members' bills. If all you're going to do is change the procedure for changing pub licensing hours in certain circumstances, you probably don't need two weeks to absorb the text of a bill on that, but this one had about 50 clauses. It would create lots of new offences. It would create lots of new delegated powers for ministers. So, you know, this is really weighty stuff.

And I think it's this part of the process where, you know, there's been a lot of talk about whether private members' bills is an appropriate process for this kind of bill. I think this is the bit of the process where that criticism really bites. You just don't have very much time at the beginning. There is no consultation stage, as I gather there is in the Assembly here. I think the Scottish Parliament have a similar consultation stage. We don't have anything similar at Westminster. So there's no consultation. There was no, you know, white paper about this. There was no impact assessment that was available at the beginning of the process. There is one now. The government undertook to produce one in the end.

But, you know, it's not a lot of time to consult on and think about and introduce a bill on such a big subject. So I think later in the process, you will see that actually there is more time than you might expect. But at the beginning, it's really, it's really very compressed indeed.

So. Oh, right. Sorry. So back to other ways in which time differs for government and private members bills. Now, there is an odd quirk for private members bills, whereby, and again, this comes to the sort of cab rank, only one of them can be in committee at once. I'm not exactly sure why that is. But if there's one private members bill in committee, you have to wait for it to come out before the next ones can go through. So you end up with a queue forming behind you.

Government bills don't have that problem. You can have lots of overlapping committee stages going on at once. And it's usually not a problem for private members bills, because it's usually really quick. There is in practice a limit to how long you can spend talking about a two clause bill that does something very, very minor. A lot of private members bills committees stages last a morning or even an hour.

But of course, this bill is going to be a bit different. And there is no rule to bring committee stage to an end because of the lack of programming. And I will come back to what that means in terms of programming in a moment.

But let's talk about the committee stage of this bill, first of all. So the committee stage in the Commons, you'll know, is usually done away from the chamber by a committee of MPs appointed specifically for this purpose. The committee ceases to exist once they've done their job of scrutinizing the bill. It is called a public bill committee, even though we're talking about private members bills. That's because private bills are a different thing. If you're thinking this terminology is mad, you're right. We should adopt some different terminology, perhaps like non-executive bill. That's been thought about, but not yet done. So it's still a public bill committee. It's still the same process.

For government bills, these usually have about 18 members. They can have up to 50 members and they will have a party balance with a government majority built in. And the members of those committees will generally be chosen by the whips. They have to put those suggestions to another committee, which usually just rubber stamps them. But effectively, it's the whips who are choosing.

But remember, there's no whips involved in this process. Kim Leadbeater gets to choose who she wants to nominate to be on her bill committee. And you would think, wow, what an amazing advantage. Surely she can just stack the committee with members who are sympathetic to her bill. It will fly through. Well, happily, it is acknowledged, both formally and informally, that that is not a good idea.

There's a little extract there from Erskine May, the sort of manual of parliamentary procedure that talks about, in the case of bills, the committee of selection will always ensure the committees reflect the party political composition of the House. That's fine. But this isn't the party political issue. But in the case of bills which divide the House on cross-party lines, that the strength of opinion as expressed in any division at second reading is properly reflected. So there is a responsibility here to not just have people who are in favour of the bill. And indeed, some of the bill's most vocal opponents, like Danny Kruger on the Conservative side, like Naz Shah on the Labour side, have been given places on this committee. But it's not as easy as just determining balance on party lines.

And again, in the committee, it's usually the ministers who are doing the heavy lifting, advocating for the bill, responding to amendments. Here, it's Kim Leadbeater. But you will see there are a couple of ministers on this list. Stephen Kinnock and Sarah Sackman, a health minister and a justice minister, respectively. Neutral, officially, on the bill, but they are taking part in divisions in a public bill committee. And they are there to give the government's view of, often, whether things are going to be workable or not, rather than whether they're in favour of the policy.

Now, a further unusual feature is that Kim Leadbeater moved this motion after the second reading of the bill. This confers what we call PPR powers on the committee, the power to send for persons, papers and records.

Now, the public bill committee's main job is to debate and decide on the contents of the bill, clause by clause. But this motion has allowed it to start, instead, by taking evidence from expert witnesses about the content of the bill. That's the same form of powers as select committees use to do their inquiries.

Public bill committees on government bills are automatically deemed to have these powers, so you don't need to pass a special motion for it, but we did in this case. And this, we think, is the first time that this has ever been done for a private member's bill, to insert this evidence-taking

stage into the public bill committee. And it's a response to wanting to make sure that the process seems open, informed, considered. In some ways, it's a bit of a compensation for not having had that consultation stage up front. Unfortunately, the immediate impact of this motion was a bit of a row in a public bill committee about which witnesses the committee wanted to hear from. Again, the initiative lies with Kim Leadbeater. She put forward a slate of witnesses, but there was lots of disagreement about who those witnesses should be.

For government bills, the whips and the usual channels are sorting this out behind closed doors, but it's not an option in this case. The committee actually had votes on which witnesses to hear from. That is highly, highly unusual, and it remained contentious throughout their evidence-taking period.

So this is a big, long list of all of the people they eventually agreed to hear from on three days. They extended that by a further day, so there was even more witnesses. Really intense days of evidence-taking from these experts, starting with Sir Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer, and going through a range of different experts. There was also written evidence coming into the bill committee, about 450 submissions in the end, I think, some of which were still coming in right up until their last sitting day.

And there was a lot of concern amongst members about how on earth they were going to be able to process all of this information and take all of this information on board in their deliberations. And remember, there's no party advisors to do the kind of analysis or sifting for them in this case. They're all doing their own stunts, if you like. But after those four days of taking evidence, it was on to debate and decision about the bill's detailed contents.

Because of the lack of programming that I mentioned before, no one knows how long this is going to take. There is no limit on how many days the public bill committee can sit. But all the time they're sitting, that calendar of those 13 private members' bills Fridays is ticking on. In the end, they had 14 days of debate and their final sitting lasted till past midnight, so that they could get everything in that they wanted to do.

So I've mentioned the lack of programming a couple of times. What is this programming that governs government bills, but that doesn't apply here?

Here's a couple of examples. This is a fairly standard example of a bill, the renter's rights bill, a government bill. And on the far side from me there, you can see a typical program motion for a bill of this sort. There is always a program motion passed after the second reading. And very importantly, it sets what we call the out date for the committee. So the committee can have as many sittings as it wants, but it must report back by Thursday, the 28th of November. So there is a hard deadline on when the committee can sit. And it also puts down some parameters for later stages.

And you'll see it's talking there about the moment of interruption. What that effectively means is on the day that it's considered, probably you've got off until about six o'clock to talk about the report stage. And then you've got one more hour to talk about third reading. And this was when the bill came back for its remaining stages and third reading. You'll see it's not the only business that day. And notably, there was an urgent question and a ministerial statement. Those eat into the time that's been set aside for the bill. So that is a bit elastic.

In the end, the report stage was about four hours. And then because of all the votes that took place on the bill, there were three minutes left for the third reading on this bill. And the

speaker called the official opposition spokesperson with 35 seconds left to speak on third reading. Mark Darcy, I think, has used the word vestigial to talk about third reading stages on government bills in the chamber. And you can see why. They often don't get very much time at all because of how programming works.

This is the planning and infrastructure bill. This one is still going through. There were nine divisions on Lord's amendments on this yesterday in the house. In this case, you had your initial programme motion, but then you had a later programme motion that was going to govern how these report stage and third reading would work. This one is relatively generous. You've got two whole days. Well, not really whole, but two, in theory, days of debate on the report stage in the chamber. But this is a huge bill and these are still very, very hard deadlines.

Programming is actually not that old as a parliamentary device. It was first suggested in 1997 by the Modernisation Committee. And after a few experiments, it was brought in permanently, I think, around about 2005. But members are very psychologically attached to it, very dependent on it.

And in the case of the terminally ill adults bill, many of them simply couldn't get their head around this idea that there was no stop, there was no programming motion, there were no guillotines. And, you know, they were constantly asking clerks, how long is this going to take? How many days of report stage are we going to have? And the answer is simply, it's up to all of you. It's up to all of you and how long you want to talk about this bill and how many votes you want to have on it.

So committee stage was where this lack of programming really began to bite. And you see this tension between a very strict timetable of you've got to get this done before the end of the session. But internally, your stages can take as little or as much time as they take. And the result is that the terminally ill adults bill has objectively had far more debate in the House of Commons than the vast majority of government bills, never mind the majority of private members bills. I'm not saying it's had enough time. And as I said, there's other deficiencies in the process, but certainly compared to other legislation, it's had a lot.

Finally, committee stage is done. Kim Leadbeater now gets to choose which Friday she chooses for her report stage. She initially went for the first one that she could, the 25th of April, but she wanted to give people a bit more time to absorb the changes that had been made to the bill. So it was delayed to the 16th of May. And again, no programming, report stage can take as long as it takes. And that makes it very vulnerable to procedural delaying tactics. You can force votes, you can speak effectively filibuster and try to talk it out so that it runs out of time. All of these sort of tactics that are available to opponents of the bill.

But to the credit, I think, of the House of Commons, opponents did not seek to use those sort of tactics in this case. I think everybody recognised that it was in everybody's interest to have substantial debate, yes, but in good faith and with an expectation that the House would be able to reach decisions.

And the biggest responsibility for managing that process is with the speaker. He has a lot of very tricky calls to make when managing this process, especially in the absence of programming. The first thing is who to call to speak and in what order to call them. Normally, the speaker would be, you know, he has a lot of discretion, but if there's a lot of people on both sides of the House wanting to speak, one of the things he will do, for example, is make

sure that he alternates between government and opposition members. You can't do that on this bill because it's not along party lines.

So one of the things the speaker's office was doing was to try to feed some intel to him about what the views of individual members were on this legislation so that you got a balance in the debate, but that didn't depend on party lines. And of course, it's massively oversubscribed. Not everybody who wants to speak on this is going to get to speak.

And in other debates and some debates on government legislation, you can impose a time limit on speeches so that you get as many members in as possible. There's a very strong convention that you do not do this for private members bills. It was not done in this case. The speaker simply gave some very, very, very strong hints from the chair that he would like members to show a bit of self-restraint. And I think there was probably quite a lot of peer pressure that went into that as well. So inevitably, many would not get to speak.

In one small way, I will say Kim Leadbeater's job as her own whip was easier than for most private members bills. Members wanted to be there. Friday is normally a constituency day. There's normally very few people around at Westminster. Only the people involved in those bills that are being discussed will generally turn up. But this is Friday talking about a report stage on the terminally ill adults bill.

That is a typical Friday in the House of Commons. Normally, the problem is you don't have enough members there in order to force a successful vote on the bill. That was not a problem that Kim Leadbeater was going to have.

Just going to skip over that next one and come back to more tricky decisions that the speaker had to make. The speaker has the power of grouping and selection of amendments. Grouping is amendments that logically or thematically go together are grouped together for debate. That's meant to make debate more coherent. It's meant to reduce repetition in what you're actually talking about.

But the judgment about what goes together, you know, we've said logically, but that logic can be open to interpretation. The thematics can be open to interpretation. The trick here is the more groups, the more opportunity there is for delay. But too few groups and debate is too wide ranging and it doesn't really make any sense. So there's a judgment call to be had there. And then the selection of amendments for decision or vote. You cannot vote on everything. You would run out of time. So which are the amendments that most people care about?

Again, for a government bill, the speaker's got whips he can talk to. The parties are talking to their foot soldiers to discuss priorities. You don't have the same machinery with this bill. And this is a very complex document.

Looking at this makes my head hurt. Showing the speaker's decisions on selection and grouping for debate. I won't attempt to go into this in detail, but you can see some of the technical difficulties that he is grappling with.

In the end, there were nearly three full days of debate on report stage. Third reading then took place after report stage on the 20th of June. Luckily, there was no need for the speaker to exercise the other possibly most tricky decision, which would have been a casting vote. The vote was close, but not that close. 314 in favor to 291 against.

So the bill passed its third reading and it's off to the House of Lords where it is currently in committee, where I think they're also making some innovations in how they scrutinize this quite unusual bill. But my knowledge of the House of Lords isn't equal to talking about it. You'd be surprised how little we understand about each other up and down the corridor.

So while all of this is going on, let's spare a thought for the other ballot bills. What's become of them in the meantime? These are the only ones out of those 20 to have made any significant progress. Everything else either failed to get a second reading or didn't even get as far as having a second reading debate.

So the ones that I've annotated there are the only ones where we might expect that they have a chance still of coming through. And what are these bills about? Scott Arthur's is about research for rare cancers. I think Alex McIntyre's is the one about pub licensing hours. And the one that's received royal assent is about absent voting in certain Scottish and Welsh elections that had government support. That's the best way to get your private members bill through. There's one creating a specific offence of unauthorised entry to a football match. There's one about indemnities for space flight. And then Danny Chambers at number 17 there, his is about restricting the import of dogs, cats and ferrets. I believe there's some technical legislative reason why ferrets had to be included as well as dogs and cats.

So while Terminally Ill Adults is in committee, none of these could make progress. They're all queuing up behind. And there are two bills that actually could have messed things up for Terminally Ill Adults bill at a later stage. And by doing so, made themselves very unpopular.

So Danny Chambers, one about dogs, cats and ferrets and another bill, which was actually a presentation bill from Aphra Brandreth about protection of livestock from dogs that had actually gone through on the nod. There was no debate about it at all, but it was supported by the government and nobody disagreed.

And the lesson is that is the easiest way to get your private members bill made legislation. If everybody agrees about it, you don't actually need a debate. You only need to decide about it and go through on the nod.

Both of those could have tried to gazump Kim Leadbeater on the second of those report stage days, but both showed admirable self-restraint and political nice and decided that, no, they would put their bills for decision for further debate after Terminally Ill Adults had finished.

So now that bill is in the Lords with a whole new set of hurdles to overcome. Remember, the bill only becomes law if both houses agree. There are plenty of private members bills who get that far and then survive unscathed through the Lords because they're uncontentious and they have government support. But it is inconceivable that this bill will not be amended in the House of Lords. And so more time is going to be needed in the Commons.

However, you will notice we ran out of Fridays some time ago. In theory, there is no more time for the Commons to consider this bill. But the session isn't over. There is a common expectation, though it is no more than that, that the government will recognise that it's in the public and parliamentary interest to give this bill a fair chance of being ultimately decided.

So it has a couple of options. It can put down a motion to name more Fridays on which to consider private members bills. That would also open the playing field for some of those other bills that are queued up behind. Or they could, an extremist, use some government time. They

could say, actually, on a Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday, we're going to discuss this. And they can do that because that's the advantage of being the government, as opposed to being the solitary backbencher who is trying to get their bill through.

Now, I'm nearly at the end of my time. I haven't been able to go back much over what I've said about select committees. Most of what I was going to say there is just to kind of give an overview of the work that we've done on the Transport Committee over the last year. I am around today until and through lunch. So if you'd like to chat about that, please do grab me. I think the questions are usually the most interesting part of these days.

The one thing I was going to emphasise in that is, you know, we do lots of big inquiries, that we take lots of evidence, we produce lengthy reports. Sometimes, actually, the most impact that we can have is, you know, it's a bit frustrating sometimes when you spend an awful lot of time working on a big inquiry and report. But sometimes we have a one-off evidence session or we just have an exchange of letters.

We've done works on driving test backlogs, on the big car outage at Heathrow Airport earlier this year, about the importance of car clubs and car sharing. All of those have had an impact in their various ways on policy throughout this year. None of them were the result of big, complicated inquiries. So, you know, my message on select committees is look out for all of the ways in which select committees are having an influence, not just those big doorstep reports that we publish from time to time as well.