

In Touch

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PEACE IN RURAL EAST ANGLIA

East Anglia's green and pleasant rural countryside is not where extreme political parties find support. In the recent council by-election in Yoxford, Suffolk, contested by the three major political parties, as well as the BNP, around 150 people out of 1080 voted for the BNP candidate. The Liberal Democrats took the seat from the Conservatives.

The BNP exploits the fears and concerns of voters by highlighting issues relating to crime, asylum seekers, immigration, illegal workers, drug abuse and everything European. It blames immigrants, not Labour's failure to control immigration. It blames immigrants, not Labour's failure to control crime. It blames immigrants for Labour's failure to invest in the NHS and our education. The BNP is unable to comment on how the NHS, schools, transport and other services could be managed without a vast number of legally settled and law abiding ethnic Britons who work anti-social hours, pay taxes and contribute to good community relations.

Labour's failure to stop illegal immigrants entering Britain, failure to limit access to genuine asylum seekers and failure to manage immigration strictly by skilled manpower requirements, create anxiety and concern amongst our people. Such an uncontrolled flow of unskilled people drains our social services and impacts adversely on standards and availability of quality of health services, education and housing for our own citizens.

Labour's failure to govern should neither devalue our national character nor tarnish our international reputation as a democratic, tolerant, just and fair nation. We fought two World Wars to defend our sovereignty and we must continue to reject extremist political parties to maintain our international standing.

EU INTERFERENCE IN AVIATION

Ryanair negotiated a special package for landing at an unknown provincial local authority owned airport in

Charleroi near Brussels. Over time, Ryanair has built up substantial traffic between Stansted and Charleroi, employing many people and benefiting passengers with offers of low fares.

The European Commission has fined Ryanair £3m claiming that Ryanair has flouted EU Competition rules by receiving a subsidy in being offered a lower priced package. The Commission is able to fine because the local authority airport does not have private shareholders and taxpaying citizens do not count! If the local authority were to privatise the airport then Ryanair can have any package!

The Commission's decision affects around 24 state-owned airports throughout Europe used by Ryanair and other low cost carriers. Ryanair has had to announce the termination of its service to Charleroi, depriving 2 million passengers of this service. Many will lose their jobs and dependent businesses/services will suffer.

Why should unelected, unaccountable and faceless bureaucrats in Brussels dictate to European citizens how every detail of any business must conform to their whims? The EU should facilitate co-operation between Member States to offer choice, quality and service, based on competition. Why do the governments of France, Italy and Spain subsidise their national carriers without any objection or fines from the EU?

Ryanair, like other low cost airlines, has offered employment and business opportunities to those who work in and around Stansted. These low cost airlines enable some 70 million people to travel. Some have invested in second homes on the continent. Such investment has boosted the income of both British and continental families.

Why should we allow the Commission to deprive British as well as continental citizens from using the services of low cost airlines flying to unused provincial airports owned by local authorities. If such traffic is

good for Stansted and rural economies in the UK and the continent then we should reject the Commission's ruling. It is essential to curb the power of the Commission and assign it the role of a civil service as we have in Britain - a service that implements legislation not initiates it!

RECYCLING BATTERIES

In Britain, about 750 million batteries are sold each year with the average family using about 30 batteries. Most of us simply bin the old batteries and so our national recycling rate is only 2% for disposable and 5% for rechargeable batteries. These recovery rates are much lower than some EU Member States e.g. Belgium and Holland who recover 60% of their batteries. The UK's collection and recycling rate for vehicle batteries, however, is 90% as most are returned to garages or industrial outlets as they have a high recycling value.

Batteries containing heavy metals like Nickel and Cadmium, leak in the ground as the casing corrodes causing soil and water pollution that endangers wildlife. Cadmium, toxic to aquatic invertebrates, can bio-accumulate in fish thereby making them unfit for human consumption. Button cell batteries, containing mercury, pose similar dangers.

I am helping to amend the EU Directive in the European Parliament that will regulate the collection and recycling of portable batteries and accumulators e.g. lead acid car batteries in the EU market. Legislation is expected to include a 100% ban on landfill or incineration of automotive and industrial batteries and require Member States to introduce a national collection and recycling scheme to facilitate consumers to return, without charge, used batteries.

As shadow draftsman, I have proposed amendments to allow Member States flexibility to aim for recycling targets of 65% by weight for lead-acid batteries, 75% for nickel cadmium batteries and 55% for all other batteries. The cost of collection, treatment and recycling would be borne by the manufacturer. Local authorities, backed by central government in the UK, would need to encourage British households to co-operate to achieve high levels of collection in order to protect our environment. The European Commission estimates the cost of collection and recycling to be about £1 per British household per annum.

ARE WOMEN DRIVERS SAFER?

Lower motor insurance premiums for women are under threat from proposed gender equality laws being discussed in the European Parliament. Women are seen as safer drivers by the insurance industry because they tend to drive shorter distances, have lower annual mileages and tend to drive more slowly.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the insurance industry all over the world assesses the risk of accident and loss to be different for women and men drivers. Similarly, irrespective of gender, premiums are also lower for older drivers and for family saloons as opposed to sports cars.

The EU proposals under discussion would make it illegal for companies to take into account differences between men and women as drivers, when setting premiums. This could mean that women's car insurance could rise by between 10 and 15 %.

The insurance industry is in business to offer cover for risk of specific drivers with respect to gender, age, profession, type of vehicle, value of vehicle and geographic location. If premiums are priced incorrectly, insurers will be unable to settle claims when they arise. Like any other business, they should be free to price their product according to their estimation of cost for the risk covered.

Equal rights for men and women are indisputable. However, equal rights do not mean identical needs or responses. Gender equality is important in areas such as education and employment but it is inapplicable in assessing risk for motor or life insurance.

The EU Directive on insurance should be formulated to facilitate business to offer cheap insurance and for consumers to receive products that are price competitive and have adequate guarantee of delivery.

I shall play my part in proposing amendments to ensure that common sense prevails and premiums for women do not rise unnecessarily.

ACTIVITIES

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| 27 Feb | South Suffolk Supper Club, Sudbury |
| 28 Feb | Haverhill Market Stall on EU Referendum |
| 1 Mar | Eastern Region CWC Conference, Duxford |
| 2 Mar | Address East Norfolk College, Gt Yarmouth |
| 3 Mar | PMQs at House of Commons, London |
| 5 Mar | Regional Media Briefing, Stansted |
| 5 Mar | Visit to Sugar Beet Farmer, Kedington, Sflk |
| 5 Mar | East Bergholt Branch AGM, South Suffolk |
| 11 Mar | Canvassing for Suffolk Coastal by-election |
| 11 Mar | Suffolk Coastal Executive Council Meeting |
| 12 Mar | Visit to local businesses in Harlow, Essex |
| 12 Mar | Central Suffolk & North Ipswich AGM |
| 19 Mar | Youth Conference on Europe, Norwich |
| 19 Mar | South Norfolk AGM |
| 26 Mar | North East Cambridgeshire AGM |
| 27 Mar | Multicultural Symposium, Southend-on-Sea |
| 29 Mar | Caston District AGM, South West Norfolk |

Please email us at: bkhanbhai@europarl.eu.int and register to receive my "In Touch" and other news.