
Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum - UK

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Press Release.....No Embargo

Asbestos victims shocked at Conservative MPs behaviour rebuked by Public Bill Committee Chair Jim Sheridan MP

Jim Sheridan MP, Chair of the Public Bill Committee scrutinising the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Prosecution of Offenders Bill rebuked Conservative MPs Ben Wallace and Ben Gummer for disrupting the Committee proceedings.

Jim Sheridan said: *“Order. Before I call the next speaker, I must say to Mr. Gummer and Mr Wallace that your conversations are becoming longer and louder and you are showing great discourtesy to the rest of the Committee.”*

Asbestos victims support groups are shocked at the behaviour of Conservative MPs when Kate Green MP was speaking about the effect of the Bill on asbestos victims dying from mesothelioma, citing the suffering of her own constituents.

Tony Whitston, Forum Chair, said: “These MPs not only showed discourtesy to the Committee, they showed utter lack of concern for asbestos victims whose plight deserved a proper and respectful hearing in the Committee.”

“These Conservative MPs from privileged backgrounds, behaving like rowdy public school boys, showed contempt for hard-working men who helped build industry in this country and who now face a death sentence as a result of their labour.”

“Their disregard for the debate on important issues on the Committee they serve shows that they would see this Bill driven through despite the many compelling arguments for change. If this is their Party’s position then working class victims of the worst ever occupational disease can forget justice.”

END

Notes for Editors

Committee hearing 13 September Chair's rebuke at Column 541

- 13.09.2011
-  [Committee debate - 12th sitting: House of Commons 13 September, 2011 \(1\) \(2\) |](#)

Mesothelioma is a fatal cancer. The only known cause is exposure to asbestos. Life expectancy is 9 to 12 months from diagnosis.

Legal aid was abolished for personal injury cases in 2000. Conditional Fee Agreements (CFA), in place since 1995, were costly to claimants who had to pay their lawyers' success fees and after the event insurance (ATE insurance). To improve access to justice when legal aid was abolished, the CFA rules were changed so that the losing party paid these costs so that the injured party did not have to pay them out of their compensation.

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Prosecution of Offenders Bill makes claimants responsible for success fees which are to be capped at 25% of damages for pain and suffering and for the cost of ATE insurance. Without the alternative of legal aid, claimants are returned to a worse position than that which obtained prior to 2000.

Some of the 400 comments from mesothelioma sufferers and their families make it clear that many mesothelioma sufferers, defeated by illness, will never make a claim because of the additional stress and the financial risk they will face. Comments can be accessed at www.asbestosforum.org.uk