

24th July 2020

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about New Clause 4 and the Trade Bill.

I do appreciate your strength of feeling about this Clause and I agree with you about the importance of effective Parliamentary scrutiny. However, I do not believe that the provisions outlined in New Clause 4 are necessary.

At its core, the Trade Bill is a continuity Bill. It cannot be used to implement new free trade agreements with countries such as the US. Instead it can only be used to transition the free trade agreements that the UK has been party to through EU membership. All these agreements have already been subject to scrutiny as underlying EU agreements, through the European Scrutiny Committee process or equivalent.

Regarding future trade agreements, public consultations have and will continue to be held prior to negotiations to inform the Government's approach. Ministers have also published their negotiating objectives prior to the start of trade talks and held open briefings for MPs and Peers.

Regular updates are provided to Parliament on the progress of negotiations too and I know that my Ministerial colleagues at the Department for International Trade will also be engaging closely with the International Trade Committee and the Lords International Agreements Committee as negotiations progress.

The Government has also made repeatedly clear that where necessary it will bring forward primary legislation to implement new free trade agreements, which will be debated and scrutinised by Parliament in the usual way.

Overall, I believe this approach strikes an appropriate balance. It respects the UK constitution, ensuring that the Government can negotiate in the best interests of the UK, while making sure that Parliament has the information it needs to effectively scrutinise and lend its expertise to trade policy.

The NHS is already protected by specific carve outs, exceptions and reservations in EU trade agreements and I know that my Ministerial colleagues have no intention of lowering standards as these trade agreements are transitioned. The very purpose of these transitioned agreements is to replicate as close as possible the effects of existing commitments in EU agreements. Indeed, I can reassure you that none of the 20 continuity agreements signed have resulted in standards being lowered.

I want to be clear that the NHS will also be protected in any future trade agreement. The price the NHS pays for drugs will not be on the table, and nor will the services the NHS provides.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

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Yours sincerely,



Alok Sharma MP