

Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons), Chair, Liaison Committee

On the point about legacy value, would it not be better to have a Chamber that we could use for more constructive purposes? Rather than this adversarial approach, we could have a circular or semi-circular Chamber, with electronic voting facilities, so that we do not build in obsolescence, and we could then use it afterwards—for example, for citizens' assemblies and other forums where we want to engage with the public.

Andrea Leadsom Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

I hope the hon. Lady will appreciate that the purpose of the Bill is merely to establish a Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority, which will give the best value for money against a professionally run project that seeks to restore the Palace of Westminster. The shape of the decant Chamber and parliamentary procedures for voting can be discussed any day of the week. All Members are encouraged to feed in their ideas and suggestions to the northern estate programme, which is separate from what we are talking about today, and I encourage her to do so.

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Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons), Chair, Liaison Committee

I apologise for being absent for part of this debate because I have been chairing a Select Committee. It is on that point that I would like to ask the hon. Gentleman's advice. Does he agree that the public would be deeply shocked if we were seen to be building obsolescence into such an extraordinarily expensive project by not having the capacity for electronic voting posts in Select Committee Rooms on the northern estate redevelopment, so that at least, if this place got its act together with modern practices, we would not be interrupting repeatedly, and at length, Select Committee hearings by the way that we vote in this place?

Neil Gray Shadow SNP Spokesperson (Work and Pensions)

That is a very good point. It is clear from the hon. Lady's intervention, among others, that the majority view—in this debate, certainly, and in others—has been that we cannot return to a Parliament that is identical to the one that we leave. There have to be changes made; there has to be progress. I hope that that will be borne out in the passage of this Bill and the discussions that follow.