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### **Data Protection Bill:**

This long-overdue Bill is a replacement of the first version, which was scrapped in March. A new and improved version passed its Second Reading on 17 April and completed its Committee Stage over 190 days ago. Despite assurances from the Government that only “minor and technical” amendments would be tabled, the Government brought forward 240 amendments at the last minute. While many are indeed minor and technical, many are significant and introduce sweeping powers that limit the rights of citizens.

I broadly support the aims of the Bill in modernising data legislation, such as by introducing a digital verification framework, strengthening the Information Commissioner’s enforcement powers and taking measures to tackle nuisance calls. However, I am concerned that the Government measures introduced at Report Stage leave big, practical holes in the Bill.

In particular, I have concerns around four components of the Bill. The first is changes to electoral practices under the guise of what the Government calls “democratic engagement”, which will mean that any political party can engage in direct marketing relying on a soft opt-in procedure. I also have concerns on changing the terminology on refusing subject access requests from “manifestly unfounded or excessive” to “vexatious or excessive”, the high-risk processing of personal data, and automated decision making. The Opposition tabled amendments on these issues but they were rejected by the Government.

I also supported an amendment that sought to ensure that special category data, such as that relating to a person’s health, is adequately protected in workplace settings. Unfortunately, this was also rejected by the Government.

Furthermore, I worry that Ministers have given themselves extensive powers in this Bill and believe these powers should be removed. This is in addition to concerns that the Government introduced its amendments to the Bill at the last possible moment, which means the Bill did not receive its usual level of scrutiny.

I therefore supported a re-committal motion to put the Bill back to committee for further scrutiny. Unfortunately, this was rejected by the Government. As a result, the Bill progressed to a vote for its Third Reading, where it successfully passed. I hope the Bill will now be able to go through line-by-line scrutiny in the House of Lords, which it has been unable to do in the House of Commons.

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