

MPs reject GP's bid to force Health Bill debate

MPs on the Backbench Business Committee have refused to allow time for a parliamentary debate after a leading GP's e-petition calling on the Government to drop the health bill, collected more than 162,000 signatures.

The committee, which decides on which subjects will be debated in the House of Commons in backbench time, has voted against a debate of Dr Kailash Chand's e-petition. Labour MP Jonathan Reynolds had presented a request to debate the e-petition, with support from Labour colleagues and Liberal Democrat, Green, SDLP and DUP MPs.

Dr Chand, who is chair of NHS Tameside and Glossop and was formerly a member of BMA Council, described the decision as an 'insult', and said he was 'angry, disappointed and saddened'.

'What's the point of e-petitions if they turn down for debate the one that got the most signatures of any so far?' he said. 'It's an insult to the very democracy we're so proud of.'

Labour MP Mr Reynolds, who tabled the request for the debate, said: 'It is disappointing that the Backbench Business Committee did not allocate a day for further debate of the Health and Social Care Bill.'

'The Government allocated just one day to the Second Reading of the Health and Social Care Bill last year – and there is clearly a groundswell of opinion to suggest that was not enough. Now a wide range of professional bodies have spoken out against the proposed changes – and the growing e-petition reflects the mounting public feeling against it.'

'I believe there is a strong case for the Bill to be debated further – and that the Conservative Party appears to be afraid to do so is an insult to Parliament.'

The Conservative Party's manifesto in 2010 stated that 'with a Conservative Government, any petition that secures 100,000 signatures will be eligible for formal debate in parliament.' The Government's website states that any petition reaching 100,000 signatures 'could be debated' in the House of Commons, but a debate is not guaranteed.

The Backbench Business Committee webpage states: 'The committee can consider any subject for debate, including those raised in e-petitions or national campaigns, but an MP must make their case for consideration....The committee has limited time to schedule for debates and it is not possible to allocate debates on all the subjects suggested.'