



Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit

House of Commons, January 18, 2021

Speech by James Murray MP (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)

Our country went into 2021 with soaring covid infection rates, the highest excess death rate in Europe, and having had the worst recession of any major economy. Whatever happens with the vaccination programme, we face many more months of restrictions and the economic impacts will be felt for years to come.

Yet the Chancellor and the Government cannot see how wrong it is to take away £20 a week from families who, having been hit by 10 years of cuts to social security and incomes, are now struggling with the extra costs of food and bills in the middle of the worst economic crisis in 300 years.

It is a disgrace that today's debate is even necessary.

This cut to universal credit will hit millions of the poorest families across the country. In my constituency in west London, 44% of children are living in poverty.

The cut will hit thousands of families in Ealing North, where over 4,300 households with children received universal credit in August last year, up by more than 1,800 since the start of last year.

The mother of one of those families, Clare, wrote to me on Friday night about today's debate. She kindly agreed that I could read out a few sentences from her email. She explained that:

"the £20 weekly boost is such a lifeline for us, especially for my family. I am a single parent and have an autistic son who is extremely vulnerable.

"I also have severe COPD and this extra amount has allowed us to buy some good reading books and nice food which we could not afford without the £20 boost.

"My son needs constant care, and just for him to have the books to read gives me some free time to relax and have some time to catch up on chores, and also my sleep as my son only sleeps 4 hours max at night.

"I have also been able to bake some nice meals that are nutritious where I could not afford most of the ingredients before the extra was put in place."

Families such as Clare's and others across the country need that extra help. The Government must cancel this cut, extend the uplift across legacy benefits and show that they understand the impact that their approach to social security has on people's lives.

The outbreak has confirmed how inadequate our social security system has become and how challenging it is for so many people to get by from one week to the next.

The fact that the Government felt they had to increase universal credit by £20 a week at the outset of the covid crisis shows how insufficient it already was. Beyond the outbreak, we are clear that the system should be replaced with one that offers a proper safety net and decent support for all.

Cancelling the £20 cut to universal credit will not right all that is wrong, but it will be a lifeline for millions as we come through this crisis.
