



State Opening of Parliament: Postponements

Summary

Prior to the dissolution of the 2015–17 parliament, the Government Chief Whip in the House of Lords, Lord Taylor of Holbeach, stated that the State Opening following the general election held on 8 June 2017 would take place on 19 June 2017.¹ However, the new Leader of the House of Commons, Andrea Leadsom, stated after polling day that the Government had agreed with Buckingham Palace that State Opening would take place two days later, on 21 June 2017.² It was reported that the postponement was due to post-election talks between the Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party.³

This briefing provides information on four previous occasions on which the State Opening of Parliament is recorded to have been postponed. This briefing is not exhaustive and the House of Lords Library would welcome information on other occasions when the State Opening of Parliament has been postponed.

Previous Postponements of the State Opening of Parliament

1980

On 16 October 1980, Lord Soames (Conservative), then Lord President of the Council, made a statement in which he outlined the Government's decision to postpone the State Opening of Parliament for a week, from 13 November to 20 November of that year. Lord Soames cited the Government having taken note of the "need for full consideration" of Bills then before the House as the reason for the postponement.⁴

1976

On 26 October 1976, Lord Byers (Liberal), then Leader of the Liberal Party in the House of Lords, moved a motion to the effect that the House had not been able to effectively fulfil its role as a revising chamber due to the pressure of the parliamentary timetable.⁵ Lord Carrington (Conservative), then Leader of the Opposition, moved two amendments to this motion. When moving his amendments, Lord Carrington stated that he thought the House had been "asked to work at a pressure which makes it impossible for the Bills before this House to be adequately discussed".⁶ The motion, as amended, was agreed to and read as follows:

That this House calls upon Her Majesty's Government to recognise that it is vitally important that this House should examine in detail legislation much of which has been denied discussion and scrutiny on the floor of the House of Commons, regrets that Her Majesty's Government has failed to give effect to this principle and requests that adequate parliamentary time be afforded for the discussion and scrutiny of legislation.⁷

Two days later, Baroness Llewelyn-Davies of Hastoe (Labour), then Government Chief Whip in the House of Lords, made a statement to the effect that the session was being extended.⁸ She stated that the State Opening of Parliament for the next session would no longer take place on 17 November, as planned. Instead, the Queen had agreed to open the next session a week later—on 24 November.⁹

1945

On 30 July 1945, *The Times* reported that the first State Opening of Parliament following the general election of that year had been postponed from 8 August to 15 August in order to “give the Prime Minister [Clement Attlee] more time to complete the new government and to formulate their programme”, after his return from the Potsdam Conference taking place in occupied Germany.¹⁰ The first State Opening of the 1945–50 parliament took place on this later date, with King George VI reading the speech from the throne.¹¹

1924

The first State Opening of Parliament following the general election held in October 1924 was planned to take place on 24 November of that year.¹² However, it was reported in early November that it was probable that the State Opening would be deferred.¹³ It was later confirmed that the State Opening would be held on 9 December 1924.¹⁴ King George V read the speech from the throne on this date.¹⁵

¹ [HL Hansard, 27 April 2017, col 1446.](#)

² Leader of the House of Commons, [‘Official Twitter Account’](#), 15 June 2017.

³ BBC News, [‘Queen’s Speech Faces Delay as DUP Talks Continue’](#), 12 June 2017.

⁴ [HL Hansard, 16 October 1980, cols 1483–4.](#)

⁵ [HL Hansard, 26 October 1976, cols 276–80.](#)

⁶ [ibid, cols 280–6.](#)

⁷ [ibid, cols 276–317.](#)

⁸ [HL Hansard, 28 October 1976, col 635.](#)

⁹ *ibid*; George Clark, ‘Government Ready to Extend Session and Postpone State Opening to Get Delayed Legislation Through Parliament’, *The Times*, 26 October 1976, p 2; and *The Times*, ‘State Opening of Parliament’, 30 October 1976, p 14.

¹⁰ *The Times*, ‘Opening of Parliament Postponed’, 30 July 1945, p 4.

¹¹ [HL Hansard, 15 August 1945, cols 8–12.](#) Following the King’s Speech, the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, made an announcement regarding the surrender of Japan in the House of Commons.

¹² *The Times*, ‘Government Resigns’, 5 November 1924, p 14.

¹³ *ibid*.

¹⁴ *The Times*, ‘Tickets for Opening of Parliament’, 15 November 1924, p 13.

¹⁵ [HL Hansard, 9 December 1924, cols 6–11.](#)

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