

3.5million women were hit by change in the state pension age... if you're one of them, chairman of the Waspi women ANGELA MADDEN reveals why she's confident that Burnham will deliver on promise to green-light compensation

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Britain's Waspi chairman Angela Madden is quietly confident that Prime Minister Andy Burnham will honour a longstanding pledge to pay compensation to 3.5million women born in the 1950s who were given inadequate notice of increases to their state pension age.

Many were hit hard in the pocket as a result – and left with little time to plug the hole in their finances.

Speaking exclusively to the Daily Mail, 72-year-old Madden believes Burnham is in 'listening mode' and that 'if he can do something, he will'. She is adamant this is the case despite the PM seemingly rowing back on his support for Waspi (Women Against State Pension Inequality) women in June by suggesting that compensation could merely take the form of 'concessionary travel' – something most women born in the 1950s already enjoy by virtue of their age.

'When he said that [concessionary travel], what he was really saying is that he would do something for us, but he didn't know what that "something" would be,' insists Madden. 'What we now need to do is sit around a table with Government and talk about what the options are.'

She adds: 'The Prime Minister has a golden opportunity to prove he is a man of the people if he works with us. He might not be able to deliver 100 per cent of what we want, but us Waspis can't be left with nothing.'

Earlier this month, Madden and fellow Waspi campaigner Janet Fulster wrote a second note in as many months to Burnham urging him to have the 'political will' to resolve the issue.

They said that 'fair and proportionate' redress should be paid, taking into account the state of the nation's finances. He has yet to respond.

The holy grail that Waspi wants is the maximum £10billion-plus compensation (£2,950 per person) that the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman recommended in early 2024. This came after a six-year probe by the ombudsman into how effectively (or ineffectively) the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) communicated state pension age increases to women in the late 1990s and early 2000s.



Waspi women out in force to campaign for justice and compensation. They say they were horribly betrayed by Keir Starmer's Labour Government



Waspi chairman Angela Madden, seen outside Parliament, believes Andy Burnham is in 'listening mode' and that 'if he can do something, he will'

Five years ago, the ombudsman found the DWP guilty of 'maladministration' for failing to give many of these women adequate and timely information about the fact that their state pension age would increase.

As a result, many didn't understand how the changes would affect them until it was too late to do anything to mitigate the delay in receipt of their state pension. For those dependent upon it for a majority of their retirement income – single women especially – the financial impact was devastating.

The increases were triggered initially by the 1995 Pensions Act which paved the way for the state pension age for women to rise in steps from 60 to 65 between 2010 and 2020. The subsequent 2011 Pensions Act then brought forward the qualifying age of 65 for women to 2018. Six years ago, the state pension age for both men and women increased to 66.

In 2024, the ombudsman followed up its report by recommending the compensation that should be paid: Ranging from £3.5billion (£1,000 per individual) to in excess of £10billion.

Waspi sensed a victory after nearly ten years of hard campaigning on the issue, although they had initially called for individual compensation of £10,000. But they were horribly betrayed by Keir Starmer's Labour Government.

Although Labour in opposition had backed Waspi's longstanding call for compensation, the party failed to give it a mention in its 2024 Election manifesto. It was an ominous omission.

In late 2024, it rejected the ombudsman's recommendations, with the then Works and Pensions Secretary of State Liz Kendall describing the compensation as not representing a 'fair or proportionate use of taxpayers' money'.

She also said that most women already knew about the state pension age changes so were not harmed by DWP delays in sending out letters to them about the matter. Her defence of the decision in the House of Commons was met with shouts of 'shame'.

Just under a year later, the Government agreed to reconsider its decision not to compensate after new evidence came to light. But early this year, it said it would be standing firm.

To say Madden is angry over Labour's betrayal is an understatement. 'I am appalled that Labour stood four-square behind us in our call for compensation,' she says, 'and then let us down when we needed them most.'

She adds: 'The parliamentary ombudsman defends citizens against government wrongdoing. Its six-year investigation, which looked at all the evidence with a fair eye, came up with a solution in the form of compensation and I don't believe its recommendations should be ignored. And I don't believe Andy thinks they should be ignored either.'

Certainly, most of the mood music coming from Burnham and his phalanx of advisers is positive.

In early June, ahead of becoming Prime Minister, he said that he had 'long supported' the Waspi campaign. In a jab at Starmer, he said: 'I feel uncomfortable when politicians were all holding up that sort of banner and then it got into government and didn't do anything.'

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The median private pension pot for women aged 55 to 59 is £81,000, compared with £156,000 for men, says the DWP



'So I stick by the campaigns that I support. I stuck by the Hillsborough families [those who lost loved ones in the 1989 disaster at the home of Sheffield Wednesday and demanded justice, which Burnham helped effect]. I'll stick by the Waspi women because they deserve some recompense for the unfairness.'

Madden says justice for Waspi will not cost the Government £10billion, claiming that Labour under Starmer used the figure to 'scare' people into thinking it would be a big burden for taxpayers to pay.

'Look, first of all, it's a one-off payment,' she says. 'Once the payment is made, the burden on the State has gone for ever.'

'Secondly, the compensation could be spread over two or three tax years to help the Government's finances.'

'And finally, women should have to apply for it. There are women out there who tell us they knew about the change to their state pension age through one circumstance or another – and so won't claim any compensation.'

'Former Prime Minister Theresa May is in the pool of Waspi women. It's very unlikely that she would put a claim in. She knew about the changes.'

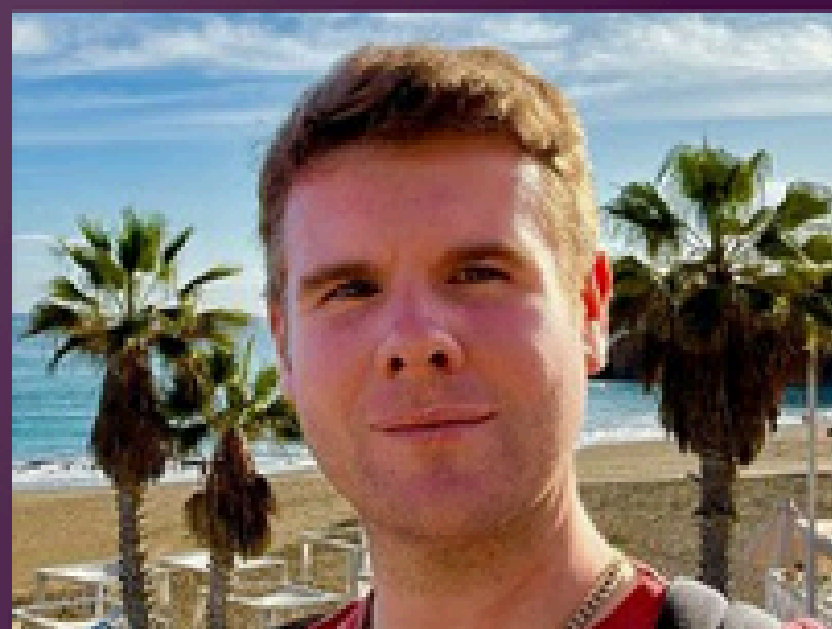
She adds: 'We will explore all these issues with Andy and come up with a solution that is fair both to the taxpayer – and I'm among them – and the Waspi community.'

Madden, who lives near Chesterfield, Derbyshire, with husband Joseph, has skin in the campaign. She had to stop working as a computer specialist in 2008 at age 54 to look after her ill mother Mary.

But she wouldn't have done so if she had realised that four years later, she would be told that her state pension would not be paid in 2014 as expected – but in 2019.

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'I was lucky in some respects because my husband had a good job, so he was able to support me until I turned 65. But he shouldn't have had to do this.

'For far too long, women had a poor pension deal, both at work and from the State. Yes, things have got better, but wrongs must be righted.'

Although Madden believes October's **Budget** will include nothing on Waspi compensation, she is hopeful that a Government commitment to compensation will come in the next year.

'The force is with us,' she says. 'Some 80 per cent of the public back our campaign for compensation, we have some 100,000 Waspi members, and 150,000 women follow us on social media. Justice must prevail and sooner rather than later, given that a Waspi woman dies every 13 minutes.

'Some 450,000 have passed since we launched our campaign 11 years ago. How many more will die before justice is done?'

It's hard to walk away from interviewing the gentle and kindly Angela Madden without feeling angry over the State's pension betrayal of women born in the 1950s.

As she said to me, justice must prevail. It's now in the hands of the Prime Minister. Will he stick to his promise to deliver compensation or will he be as two-faced as Starmer was?

More than three million women await his decision with bated breath. Money Mail asked No10 Downing Street for a comment on whether the Prime Minister would follow through on its promise to compensate Waspi women.

It merely said it had accepted 'maladministration' and given an 'apology to the women affected'.

It added that the DWP had learned lessons from the ombudsman's investigation and had published an action plan in the pursuit of 'effective, timely and modern communications on the state pension'.

- ***Do you think Waspi women deserve compensation? Contact jeff.prestridge@dailymail.co.uk.***